

# Maldives

*In 2011, the Maldives made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms child labor. The Government passed the Drug Act, criminalizing the use of children in drug trafficking; it also improved its interagency coordination on trafficking in persons and ratified a Human Trafficking Action Plan. In addition, the Government took steps to extend access to secondary education to children living in remote areas, including by opening schools on nearly every island of the country. However, the Government has not established a list of hazardous work activities for children, and there is no compulsory education requirement. While the country has a steering committee on counter-trafficking, there is no coordination mechanism on other child labor issues. Although the Government has not collected data on the issue, girls in the Maldives are reportedly exploited in prostitution and as domestics in private households.*

## Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate		120.3

### Sources:

**Primary completion rate:** Data from 2009, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012.(1)

**All other data:** Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis.(2)

## Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

There are reports of limited numbers of children engaged in the worst forms of child labor in the Maldives, particularly girls working in prostitution and as domestics in private households.(3-5) Girls are reportedly trafficked for prostitution within the country and from Bangladesh to the capital city, Malé, although the extent of the problem is unknown.(4) The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed serious concern about the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the Maldives and has warned that a lack of research on the commercial sexual exploitation of children has led to widespread denial of the problem.(6) Child domestics work long hours and are isolated in private homes where they are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(7) The extent of this problem is unknown.



In the past, due to the unavailability of secondary education on smaller islands, children from these islands would commonly live with “host families” on larger islands in order to attend secondary school. They would perform domestic work in exchange for lodging and there were reports that some were abused and some never received any education.(3, 5) However, the Government has now opened secondary schools on nearly every inhabited island of the country except the very smallest, and daily ferry service is provided to enable children from the smallest islands to attend secondary school on larger islands. Children whose families cannot afford the ferry service are provided a stipend.(3, 5)

## Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Employment Act establishes 16 as the minimum age for work, and 18 as the minimum age for work that may have a detrimental effect on a child's health, education, safety or conduct.(8) Research has not found evidence of laws or regulations that specify the types of work activities and processes that are hazardous and thus prohibited to children.

The Employment Act permits minors under age 16 to work in family businesses, provided such work is voluntary, and to perform work in connection to an education or a training program.(8) However, children under age 16 cannot be required to work during school hours or after 11 p.m.(8)

	C138, Minimum Age	No
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	No
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	No
	Minimum Age for Work	16
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	13
	Free Public Education	Yes

The Constitution establishes the right to free education. It states that “it is imperative on parents and the State to provide children with primary and secondary education,” but the law does not establish an age for compulsory schooling.(3, 9) However, the Government reported to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics that education is compulsory until age 13.(10) The fact that education is compulsory until age 13 places children ages 13 to 16 at risk of involvement in the worst forms of child labor, as they are not required to be in school and are below the minimum age for work.

The Employment Act and the Constitution both prohibit forced labor, and the Constitution prohibits slavery and servitude.(8, 9) The Government does not have laws in place prohibiting trafficking in persons.(4) The Penal Code and the Child Sex Abuse (Special Provisions) Act criminalize the use of children for prostitution and pornography, but these offenses are not criminalized if the perpetrator and victim are married under Sharia Law.(3)

In 2011, the Government enacted the Drug Act, which explicitly prohibits the use of children in drug trafficking.(3) There is no compulsory conscription into the military, and the voluntary recruitment age is 18.(11)

## Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

Although the Government of the Maldives has established an interagency steering committee to strengthen counter-trafficking coordination, research found no evidence of a coordinating mechanism to combat other worst forms of child labor.(3)

The Ministry of Health and Family (MHF) and the Labor Relations Authority (LRA) enforce the child labor provisions of the Employment Act.(3) New MHF inspectors are provided training by LRA lawyers. In 2011, the LRA employed 11 labor inspectors and 6 investigation officers to inspect for all violations of the Employment Act.(3) The LRA conducted 197 routine labor inspections in 2011 and found no child labor. It also received approximately 1,000 labor-related complaints, but none involved child labor violations.(3) During the reporting period, the ILO provided a 3-day training to labor inspectors on general labor administration issues, but inspectors and officers do not receive targeted training on child labor issues.(3)

The Ministry of Human Resources (MHR) has a “blacklist” of employers who violate any provision of the Employment Act, and employers on the blacklist cannot employ new workers until violations are corrected. During the reporting period, no employers were blacklisted for child labor violations.(3)

The Department of Immigration and Emigration (DIE) is the Government’s focal point on trafficking in persons. In 2011, an interagency steering committee was formed to strengthen counter-trafficking coordination.(12) The committee includes the Maldives Police Service (MPS), the DIE, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the LRA, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Family, the Maldivian Democracy Network (an NGO), and the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives. The committee met four times in 2011. According to a DIE official, lack of awareness about TIP issues among the committee members is an impediment to the committee’s work.(12) No formal system is in place for identification of trafficking victims and no victims were identified in the reporting period.(4)

The Government’s Family and Children’s Centers assist the public in reporting cases of abuse against both women and children.(13) When cases of child sexual abuse are identified, including child prostitution, the MHF’s Department of Gender and Family Protection Services (DGFPS) provides victim care, while the MPS’s Family and Child Protection Unit investigates the cases and refers them to the Prosecutor General’s Office for prosecution.(6, 13) The MHF employs 14 case workers in

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Malé and 1 or more in each of its 19 Family and Children’s Centers.(3) Two cases of child prostitution are currently under investigation.(4)

## Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In 2011, the Government’s Steering Committee on trafficking ratified a Human Trafficking Action Plan.(4)

The Government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) includes specific goals of increasing support services to children, improving data collection and analysis on vulnerable children and coordinating, monitoring and evaluating child protection services provided by social service providers and NGOs.(14) The UNDP Country Program for the Maldives (2011-2015) aims to support the ILO in developing a Decent Work framework to address youth unemployment, among other issues. The Country Program also aims to promote equitable access to justice and rule of law by increasing the capacity of the Prosecutor General’s Office and the employment tribunals, and training these institutions on human rights issues.(15)

The question of whether these poverty alleviation and rule of law policies have an impact on the worst forms of child labor does not appear to have been addressed.(3) The Government

does not regularly collect data on working children, making it difficult to understand the scope of the problem and to design strategies to address it. However, the Maldives Human Rights Commission is currently conducting an assessment of the scope of the trafficking in persons problem in the country.(3)

## Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Social protection centers on many of the Maldives’ islands provide temporary shelter and protection for children in need, which could include children rescued from abusive work situations.(6) The MHF provides general protection and rehabilitation services, such as counseling, family reintegration, medical treatment and educational assistance to vulnerable children.(16) The target population for such services could include children in the worst forms of child labor, but the extent to which such children are involved is unknown. The MHF operates a hotline to report child abuse cases.(13, 17) It is unclear if these included cases of children abused in work settings and/or in commercial sexual exploitation.

Research found no evidence of any programs that specifically address the worst forms of child labor for children engaged in domestic service or those that who may be exploited in forced prostitution.

## Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in the Maldives:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Amend the Employment Law or enact regulations specifying the work activities and processes that are hazardous to children.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Raise compulsory education to age 16, the minimum age for work.	2011
	Enact a law against trafficking in persons.	2011
	Enact laws to criminalize all child prostitution and pornography, even when it occurs within a marriage relationship.	2010, 2011
Coordination and Enforcement	Establish a coordination mechanism to combat all worst forms of child labor.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate receives training on child labor issues.	2009, 2011
	Put in place a formal system for identification of trafficking victims.	2011
Policies	Assess the impact that existing poverty alleviation policies may have on addressing child labor, particularly in domestic service and forced prostitution.	2009, 2010, 2011

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Policies	Conduct research on the prevalence of the worst forms of child labor to determine whether better-targeted policies and services are necessary.	2009, 2010, 2011
Social Programs	Develop and implement programs to address the worst forms of child labor, particularly for children exploited in domestic service and forced prostitution.	2009, 2010, 2011

## REFERENCES

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