

In 2018, Sri Lanka made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government worked with the ILO to develop guidelines for establishing child labor free zones and trained government officials to implement this program. In addition, the National Child Protection Authority trained 2,770 criminal law enforcement officials on the prevention of the worst forms of child labor. However, children in Sri Lanka 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 domestic work. The hazardous work list is not comprehensive because it does not include domestic work. In addition, the labor inspectorate is not authorized to assess penalties.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Sri Lanka 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 domestic work. (1-4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Sri Lanka.

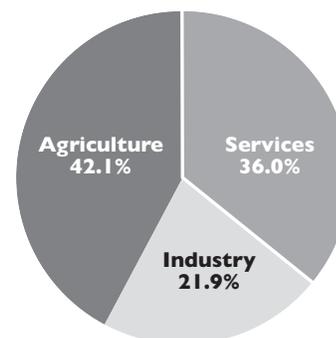
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	0.8 (28,515)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	98.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	0.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)		101.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Child Activity Survey, 2016. (6)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



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	Farming, including raising livestock (4,7,8)
	Fishing, including deep sea fishing, processing fish, and selling fish (7-10)
Industry	Manufacturing, including textiles and garments, and food processing (3,7,11)
	Mining† and construction, activities unknown (7,11,12)
Services	Domestic work (4,7,13)
	Vending, in stores and on the streets, transportation, and begging (4,7,9)
	Work in hotels, restaurants, and offices (7,12)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, including the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-4,14,15)
	Forced labor in domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,4)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking (4)

† 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.

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The 2016 Child Activity Survey’s definition of child labor does not align with international standards because children ages 5–11 working less than 15 hours per week and children ages 12–14 working less than 25 hours per week in agriculture are not counted as child laborers. These issues may have led to an underestimation of the population of children in child labor in the Child Activity Survey. (7)

There are reports of children being trafficked internally, including from tea estates, to perform domestic work in Colombo. In addition, child domestic workers are subject to sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, non-payment of wages, and restrictions on movement. (1,4) Children, predominantly boys, are also forced into commercial sexual exploitation in tourist areas as part of the sex tourism industry. (1,4,15)

Although the government provides free education to all school children, some children in rural areas face barriers to accessing education, including difficulties traveling to school in some regions and an inadequate number of teachers. (4)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Sri Lanka 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 Sri Lanka’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including protections for children engaged in domestic work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Sections 7, 9, 13 and 34 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act (16)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 20A of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act (16)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Hazardous Occupations Regulation No. 47 (16,17)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 358A, 360C, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code (18)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 360C, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code (18)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 286A, 360B, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code (18)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Sections 288, 288A, 288B, and 360C of the Penal Code (18)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Sections 20A and 31 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act; Section 2(xviii) of the Hazardous Occupations Regulation No. 47 (16,17)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		358(1)(d) of the Penal Code; Sections 20A and 31 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act; Section 2(xviii) of the Hazardous Occupations Regulation No. 47 (16-18)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Section 43 of the Education Ordinance; Compulsory Attendance of Children at Schools Regulation (19,20)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 47 of the Education Ordinance (19)

* No conscription (21)

As the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (16, 19,20) The hazardous work list is not comprehensive because it does not include domestic work, for which there is evidence that children are subject to abuse. (1) In 2018, the government adopted an amendment to the Hazardous Occupations Regulation to include domestic work and 24 additional activities prohibited for children. However, the revised list must be approved by the cabinet and adopted by parliament before becoming law. (4)

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 Department of Labor that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Labor in the Ministry of Labor, Trade Union Relations, and Social Empowerment (MLTURSE)	Enforces child labor laws and receive public complaints of child labor filed in national and district-level offices. Refers cases involving the worst forms of child labor to the police and National Child Protection Authority (NCPA). (22) Conducts special investigations in relation to child labor through the Women and Children's Affairs Division. (4,23)
Children and Women's Bureau of the Sri Lankan Police (CWBSLP)	Enforces laws on child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the use of children in illicit activities. (4,22)
NCPA Special Police Investigation Unit	Investigates complaints involving children, including unlawful child labor. (4,23)
Department of Probation and Child Care Services	Coordinates services for child victims of forced labor, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation who have been referred by the police and the court. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, labor law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the Department of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the labor inspectorate's lack of authority to assess penalties.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$950,000 (4)	\$1,154,000 (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	524 (11)	509 (4)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (11)	No (4)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (11)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	49,907 (11)	91,000 (4)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (11)	Unknown (4)

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	7 (10)	2 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	3 (10)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown	0 (24)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (11)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (11)	Yes (4)

In June 2018, the labor inspectorate conducted a series of child labor specific inspections across the country, covering 472 workplaces in the agriculture, services, and manufacturing sectors. (4)

However, the number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Sri Lanka's workforce, which includes over 8.9 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Sri Lanka would employ about 596 labor inspectors. (25-27) While penalties were not imposed or collected for child labor violations during the reporting period, the Department of Labor did initiate legal actions and the cases are proceeding. (24)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, criminal law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including the lack of information regarding violations found.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown	Unknown (4)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown (24)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown (24)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (28)	Yes (4)

The Children and Women's Bureau of the Sri Lankan Police (CWBSLP) has branches in police stations throughout the country. (4) However, the CWBSLP faces a shortage of funds and resources that affects their ability to carry out their mandate. (24) The government does not publicly release information on its criminal law enforcement efforts. (4,24)

The CWBSLP also supervises the National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) Special Police Investigating Unit, which has approximately 40 police officers who investigate complaints involving children, including child labor. (4,10) In addition, the NCPA has approximately 300 child protection officers based in the districts who are tasked with preventing child exploitation and with victim protection. (4,22) In 2018, the NCPA conducted trainings for 2,770 criminal investigators and police officers on the prevention of child labor. (4)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Coordinates efforts to eliminate child labor, including the implementation of the National Policy on Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka. Chaired by the Secretary of the MLTURSE, includes representatives from key government agencies, employer and workers' organizations, ILO, UNICEF, and NGOs. (4,29) During the reporting period, the steering committee met once and subcommittees met regularly and took actions to implement strategies to eliminate child labor. (4)
National Child Protection Authority (NCPA)	Coordinates and monitors activities related to the protection of children, including activities to combat child labor. Consults with the relevant government ministries, local governments, employers, and NGOs, and recommends policies and actions to prevent, and protect children from, abuse and exploitation. (29) Conducted trainings for criminal law enforcement officials during the reporting period. (4)
National Anti-Trafficking Task Force	Coordinates inter-agency efforts to address all human trafficking issues, including commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Led by the Ministry of Justice and includes representatives from a range of government agencies, including the Ministry of Social Services, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Labor Secretariat, NCPA, Department of Probation and Child Care, Police Criminal Division, and Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse to Women and Children. (30,31) During the reporting period, increased coordination efforts through more frequent meetings. (1)
Child Development Committees	Coordinate activities and exchange information between child protection officers, police, and labor, education, and health officials at the village, division, and district level. Function in 25 districts and 313 divisions. (4) In 2018, labor inspectors were formally included in the committees and over 8,500 government officials attached to the committees were trained on the elimination of child labor. (4)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Policy on Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka	Aims to mainstream child labor issues into national development policies, increase the minimum age for employment, promote the implementation of hazardous work regulations, strengthen capacity to enforce child labor laws, and maintain a complaint procedure. The MLTURSE is responsible for the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of the policy. (32) In 2018, MLTURSE and the Department of Labor drafted an Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Policy on Elimination of Child Labor (2018–2022) and plans to finalize and implement the action plan in 2019. (4,24)
Let's Protect Children	Presidential Secretariat program that seeks to monitor child protection policies implemented by the Ministries of Education, Health, and Labor. Aims to ensure child safety and physical and psycho-social development. (10) The policy was implemented during the reporting period. (4)
National Strategic Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking (2015–2019)	Seeks to combat human trafficking by raising stakeholder awareness, improving victim protection services, increasing prosecution of human trafficking cases, and conducting research and data collection. Seeks also to improve coordination among the Anti-Trafficking Task Force members. (31,33) Progress monitored during the reporting period. (34)
Decent Work Country Programme (2018–2022)†	Details the priorities and outcomes required to make progress toward the goal of decent work for all. Identifies key areas of work for the eradication of child labor by 2022, including: operationalize child labor free zone model in all districts; expand the inspection system to cover child labor in the informal sector; raise the minimum age for employment to 16 years; revise regulations on hazardous child labor; improve the complaints and referral mechanisms; and regularize data collection on child labor. (35)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (4,28,36,37)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, which cover the main sectors where child labor has been identified in the country (Table 10).

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Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Child Labor Free Zone Model†	Local government initiatives that seek to eliminate child labor through the identification of children engaged in child labor; a rehabilitation program, assistance to families of children at risk of engaging in child labor; and an awareness-raising campaign. Operated by the district secretariats, with assistance from the MLTURSE, and with technical and financial support from the ILO. (11) In 2018, the ILO and the government developed guidelines for establishing child labor free zones and conducted trainings for district government officials and senior labor officials. District secretariats in all 25 districts developed work plans based on the child labor free zone model. (4)
'1929' Childline Sri Lanka†	NCPA-funded and operated 24-hour toll-free emergency telephone service for vulnerable and abused children. Connects children in need of help to direct assistance and rehabilitation services. (38) The hotline was operational during the reporting period. (4)
Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking	The Ministry of Women and Child Affairs shelter provides children and female victims of human trafficking with safe shelter and access to medical, psychological, and legal assistance. (28,30) The shelter was operational during the reporting period. (4)
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor (CLEAR)	USDOL-funded capacity-building project implemented by the ILO in 11 countries to build local and national capacity of governments to address child labor. In 2018, the project conducted 36 workshops at the division and district level to provide training to 3,162 government officials on the Child Labor Free Zones. (39) Additional information is available at the USDOL website.

† Program is funded by the Government of Sri Lanka.

In 2018, the government made efforts to address barriers to education for children living in remote and rural areas. It recruited new teachers and constructed new buildings for plantation schools. (4) The World Bank and the Sri Lanka Ministry of Education also launched a 5-year, \$100 million General Education Modernization Project that will promote access to education for children in difficult to reach geographies, including rural, plantation, and urban areas. (4,40)

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 Sri Lanka (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited to children are comprehensive, including domestic work.	2017 – 2018
Enforcement	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties for labor law violations.	2015 – 2018
	Publish information on the number of inspections conducted at worksites.	2014 – 2018
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2018
	Collect and publish information on criminal law enforcement actions, including on initial training for new investigators, and the number of investigations, violations, prosecutions, and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.	2014 – 2018
	Provide additional funding for the CWBSLP to adequately investigate forced labor, child trafficking, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2011 – 2018
Social Programs	Ensure that the definition of child labor used in national child labor surveys to calculate child labor statistics clearly aligns with international standards.	2017 – 2018
	Eliminate barriers to education, including difficulties with transportation to schools and an inadequate number of teachers.	2012 – 2018

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