

Congo, Democratic Republic of the

NO ADVANCEMENT - EFFORTS MADE BUT COMPLICIT IN FORCED CHILD LABOR

In 2019, the Democratic Republic of the Congo made no advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government drafted a new anti-trafficking in persons law, established a national anti-trafficking coordinating body, and finalized a five-year national strategy to combat human trafficking. A military court also sentenced a former colonel to life imprisonment for the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers. Moreover, the government implemented a new universal primary education decree, expanding funding for public schools and significantly reducing the number of children vulnerable to labor exploitation. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is receiving an assessment of no advancement because of the national army's complicity in the worst forms of child labor. During the year, an Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) regiment supplied weapons and munitions to and allowed the free movement of a proxy non-state armed group known for recruiting children, enabling the armed group to expand its control over mineral-rich sites in the east. In addition, a FARDC regiment in Tshikapa forcibly abducted young girls into sexual slavery. The FARDC also illegally detained children for their alleged association with armed groups and failed to hold some of its units accountable for perpetrating the worst forms of child labor. Moreover, regiment commanders and their superiors actively interfered with investigations into forced child recruitment and the sexual exploitation of children allegedly perpetrated by their forces. Children engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in the forced mining of gold, tin ore (cassiterite), tantalum ore (coltan), and tungsten ore (wolframite), and are used in armed conflict, sometimes as a result of forcible recruitment or abduction by non-state armed groups. Other gaps remain, including a lack of trained enforcement personnel, limited financial resources, and poor coordination of government efforts to combat child labor. Research also indicates that labor inspectors failed to conduct any worksite inspections for the fourth year in a row. Labor inspections are a key tool for identifying child labor violations, and their absence makes children more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in the forced mining of gold, tin ore (cassiterite), tantalum ore (coltan), and tungsten ore (wolframite), and are used in armed conflict, sometimes as a result of forcible recruitment or abduction by non-state armed groups. (1-7) Table I provides key indicators on children's work and education in the DRC.

Table I. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	35.8 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	77.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	37.1
Primary Completion Rate (%)		69.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (8)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2013–2014. (9)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including tilling fields, planting seeds, watering crops, carrying heavy loads,† weeding, harvesting crops, and use of chemical products and machetes in the production of beans, corn, manioc, rice, and sweet potatoes (10-15)
	Fishing, including maintaining fishing tools, baiting hooks, transporting heavy loads, using explosives, and salting, smoking, and packaging fish (10-12,14,15)
	Herding and raising livestock such as chickens, goats, and pigs, including feeding, cleaning cages or stalls, and disposing of waste (11,12,15,16)
	Hunting (10,16)
Industry	Mining,† including carrying heavy loads,† digging, sifting, sorting, transporting, using explosives, washing, and working underground† in the production of diamonds, copper, cobalt ore (heterogenite), gold, tin ore (cassiterite), tantalum ore (coltan), and tungsten ore (wolframite) (1,4,5,10,13-15,17-20)
	Working as auto mechanics, in carpentry, and in craft workshops (10)
	Working on construction sites and building roads (10)
Services	Domestic work (10,13-15)
	Driving motorcycle taxis (14)
	Street work, including vending, garbage scavenging, and carrying heavy loads (10,11,14,15)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced mining of gold, tantalum (coltan), tin (cassiterite), and tungsten (wolframite), each sometimes as a result of debt bondage (3-5,15)
	Forced domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,4,10,19,21-24)
	Use in illicit activities, including for spying for non-state armed groups, carrying stolen goods, and smuggling minerals (3,21,25,26)
	Forced recruitment or abduction of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including as checkpoint monitors, combatants, concubines, domestic workers, field hands, human shields, looters, porters, spies, and tax collectors at mining sites (3,15,27,28)

† 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.

In 2019, the UN verified 601 cases of child recruitment by non-state armed groups, down from 631 confirmed cases the previous year. The figure represents an all-time low in the DRC, where the government and international partners secured commitments from 27 armed groups to ending the recruitment and use of children and other grave violations. (28,29) As a result, 3,107 children, an all-time high, were separated from armed groups during the reporting period. (28,30) The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC) also made important military gains against the *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda-Forces combattantes abacunguzi* (FDLR) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), and successfully prosecuted a leader of Raia Mutomboki during the reporting period. (29) However, some of the 150 non-state armed groups operating in the DRC continued to abduct, recruit or use children in armed conflict during the reporting period. (3,28,31) Perpetrators included Nyatura (167), Mai-Mai Mazembe (103), ADF (55), *Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové* (49), Kamuina Nsapu (37), FDLR (22), *Raia Mutomboki* (18), *Conseil national pour la renaissance et la démocratie*, and unidentified armed groups (17 each), *Alliance des Patriotes Pour un Congo Libre et Souverain* (APCLS) (13), and additional armed groups (103). (28,32,33) Non-state armed groups in Ituri reportedly seized young children from their homes, forcing them to transport heavy loads or perform domestic work. (15) UNICEF and other international organizations have estimated that between 40 and 70 percent of non-state armed groups in central DRC include children, some as young as five. (26,34)

In July, the International Criminal Court also convicted Bosco Ntaganda, former leader of the *Forces Patriotiques pour la Libération du Congo* (FPLC), on 18 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. (35) The sentencing judgement for Ntaganda included 3 counts of conscripting children under age 15 into armed conflict, and 2 counts of sexually enslaving FPLC female recruits under age 15. (36)

Children in the DRC’s eastern and southern provinces engage in the worst forms of child labor in mining. In eastern Congo’s conflict-affected regions, children extract and transport tin (cassiterite), tantalum (coltan), tungsten (wolframite), and gold. Thousands of children also work in cobalt and copper mines in the DRC’s

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southern Copperbelt region. (3,5,37,38) Prevalence is highest in the country's artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector, which tends to operate with minimal oversight. Child labor has been detected at one in four ASM sites in the DRC, with informal or illegal ASM operations leaving children uniquely exposed to hazardous working conditions and, in some instances, forced labor. (37,39,40) As many as 35,000 of the DRC's 255,000 artisanal cobalt miners are children. (41) Despite strong evidence of children engaged in armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation, and forced labor in mining, the prevalence and nature of child labor in other sectors remains unclear because a comprehensive, stand-alone child labor survey has never been conducted in the DRC. (12)

UNICEF estimates that only 14 percent of children under age 5 have birth certificates. (42) Low rates of birth registration leave many children vulnerable to child labor because it makes age verification difficult during FARDC recruitment campaigns and hinders efforts to identify and separate children associated with armed groups. (4,43) Moreover, tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced in eastern Congo's Ituri Province because of the conflict, making thousands of children vulnerable to sex trafficking, forced labor, or commercial sexual exploitation. (29)

While Congolese law provides for free, compulsory education, only slightly more than half of the DRC's 51,574 public schools were financed by the state. At public schools that did not receive government funding, parents were asked to pay school fees to support teacher salaries, which at times were cost prohibitive. (44,45) However, in 2019, President Tshisekedi implemented a free primary education initiative to expand funding for public schools. The initiative resulted in millions of previously out-of-school children being able to enroll, reducing the number of children vulnerable to exploitation. (15,29,46) An additional two million children in the northeast, the epicenter of the 2018–2020 Ebola outbreak, returned to school in September 2019 following a precipitous decline in transmission. (47) Nevertheless, significant obstacles remain. Schools are overcrowded, understaffed, structurally damaged by conflicts, require students to travel long distances, or used as shelter for internally displaced persons. (1,2,24,26,43,48) Non-state armed groups attacked 31 schools between January and September 2019, and 7 attacks were attributed to the FARDC. (28,32) Additionally, frequent teacher strikes occurred as a result of irregular payment of teacher salaries. (14,49)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The DRC 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 the DRC's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including its compulsory education age.

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Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 6 of the Labor Code; Article 50 of the Child Protection Code (50-52)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 10 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (53)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 8–15 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work; Articles 26 and 299 bis of the Mining Code; Article 8b of the Decree on Validation Procedures for Artisanal Mines; Article 125 of the Labor Code (51,53-56)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2 and 3 of the Labor Code; Articles 53 and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 16 and 61 of the Constitution; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (51-53, 57)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 3 of the Labor Code; Articles 53, 162, and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Article 174j of the Penal Code; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (50-52,55)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3 of the Labor Code; Articles 53, 61, 169, 173, 179–180, 182–183, and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 174b, 174j, 174m, and 174n of the Penal Code; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (50-53)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 3 of the Labor Code; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work; Articles 53, 187–188, and 194 of the Child Protection Code (51-53)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 27 of the Law on Armed Forces; Articles 53, 71, and 187 of the Child Protection Code (51,58)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes*		Article 7 of the Law on Armed Forces; Article 27 of the Law on the Military Status of the Congolese Armed Forces; Articles 53, 71, and 187 of the Child Protection Code (51,58,59)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 53, 71, and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Article 190 of the Constitution (51,57)
Compulsory Education Age	No	12‡	Article 38 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 7.21, 12, and 72 of the Law on National Education; Article 43 of the Constitution (51,57,60)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 38 of the Child Protection Code; Article 43 of the Constitution; Articles 12 and 72 of the Law on National Education (51,57,61)

* No conscription (16)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (51,61,62)

In 2019, the Agency for Prevention and the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons (APLTP) drafted and passed to the National Assembly an aggressive national anti-trafficking law. The law is scheduled for adoption in the 2020 legislative session. (29) The APLTP also designed the DRC's first ever national anti-trafficking strategy. The five-year strategy is focused on prevention, victim identification and care, and law enforcement cooperation and coordination. (29) The APLTP referred child victims of human trafficking to three different shelters in the country, providing holistic care to 650 child TIP victims in 2019. The government also finalized a bilateral accord with the Republic of Congo to prevent cross-border child trafficking. (63)

The DRC also expanded oversight of and control over its artisanal mining sector, including copper and cobalt, where child labor is prevalent. (29,64) A 2019 decree created *Entreprise Générale du Cobalt*, a new subsidiary of state-owned mining company *Gécamines*, and vested it with exclusive authority to buy and sell artisanally mined "strategic minerals." This new body aims to ensure price stability and fairness by removing unregulated middlemen from the supply chain, thereby decreasing the potential for child labor. A separate body will oversee the strategic mineral supply chain to ensure children and other vulnerable populations are not working in mining sites. (29, 56, 65)

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However, children in the DRC are required to attend school only up to age 12. This standard means children ages 12 through 15 are vulnerable to child labor, as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. (51,57,60)

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 authority of the MOL that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Employment, Labor, and Social Welfare (MOL)	Investigates cases related to child labor, including its worst forms. (66) Refers cases of child labor to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ) for prosecution. (14)
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ)	Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. (11,14) Oversees 5 juvenile courts in Kinshasa and 19 UNICEF-funded child protection courts throughout the country. (15) Assists the International Criminal Court in conducting investigations and prosecuting individuals charged with using children in armed conflict. (14,31,43)
Ministry of the Interior	Investigates allegations of human trafficking rings, refers child labor cases to the MOJ for prosecution, and coordinates support and reintegration services with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, and Humanitarian Action. (14,31) In the case of the Police Unit for Child Protection and Combating Sexual Violence, combats conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and children, protects children and women who are victims of physical abuse, and ensures the demobilization of children. (14,15,67)
Office of the President's Personal Representative on Sexual Violence and Child Recruitment	Supports and coordinates the efforts of government officials and international bodies to combat sexual violence and the use of children in armed conflict. (66,68) Compiles data on prosecutions in military and civil courts involving sexual violence against girls and maintains a hotline for reporting cases. (31)
Ministry of Defense (MOD)	Investigates and prosecutes in military courts military officials suspected of recruiting and using child soldiers, and leads the implementation of the Action Plan to End the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Through its Department of Child Protection, coordinates actions with UNICEF. (14) Through its Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Unit, coordinates demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration activities. (31,69)
Ministry of Gender and Family (MOGF)	Oversees and investigates cases related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (14)

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, and Humanitarian Affairs (MINASA) monitors humanitarian programs and coordinates with key actors to promote social services to vulnerable groups, including street children, human trafficking victims, and child soldiers. (16)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, the absence of worksite inspections conducted at the national level in the DRC may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (14)	Unknown (15)
Number of Labor Inspectors	200 (14)	200 (15)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (14)	Yes (15)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (14)	No (15)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	No (14)	No (15)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (14)	No (15)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	0 (14)	0 (15)
Number Conducted at Worksite	N/A (14)	N/A (15)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (14)	0 (15)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (14)	N/A (15)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (14)	N/A (15)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Routine Inspections Conducted	No (14)	No (15)
Routine Inspections Targeted	N/A	N/A (15)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (14)	Yes (15,52)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	No (14)	No (15)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (14)	Yes (15)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (14)	Yes (15)

The Labor Inspectorate was not operational during the reporting period and labor inspectors did not receive training or conduct inspections. It is also unknown whether the government allocated funds to the Labor Inspectorate, despite an overall sharp increase in social spending. (14,15,29,32,70,71) Moreover, the number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of the DRC's workforce, which includes over 31 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching one inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, the DRC would employ about 784 labor inspectors. (70,71) That said, 80 percent of the DRC labor force is engaged in the informal sector, and agriculture—the largest rural employer—is primarily of a subsistence nature, creating the need for a nuanced approach to advancing labor inspections. (63,72)

The government made some efforts to combat child labor in mining. During the reporting period, 25 government mine inspectors and mine controllers, along with local monitoring committees, were trained on mine inspection and validation in all territories of North and South Kivu. Topics included child labor detection, hazards assessment, and additional compliance measures. (15,29)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in the DRC 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 allocation of financial resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (14)	No (15)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (14)	No (15)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (15)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (14)	Unknown (15)
Number of Violations Found	2,255 (31)	3,129 (29)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	13‡ (32)	3‡ (15,29)
Number of Convictions	2‡ (32,73)	Unknown (15)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (7,73,74)	Unknown (15)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (15)

During the reporting period, elements of the FARDC were complicit in child abduction, supporting an armed group that recruited and used child soldiers, illegal detention of children allegedly associated with armed groups, ransacking schools, and extortion and physical abuse of child laborers at mining sites. The government, however, made some efforts to begin addressing these violations, as well as those perpetrated by non-state armed groups. (29) In February 2019, for instance, military prosecutors issued a warrant for the arrest of Katolongele Kambale Jadot, an armed group intelligence officer accused of engaging in child recruitment and other crimes between 2011 and 2013. As of the time of this writing, he remains at large. (29) In June, a North Kivu military court sentenced former FARDC Colonel Dominique Birihanze to life imprisonment for the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. (29,75) And in November, the Bukavu Garrison Court in South Kivu condemned Frederic Masudi Alimasi and two other members of *Raia Mutomboki*—a militia accused of systematic child soldier recruitment by the UN in 2018—to 15 years' to life imprisonment for sexual enslavement and other crimes against humanity. (76) During the proceedings, the government was also found liable for failing to take

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all necessary measures to prevent the crimes, and ordered to pay reparations to over 300 victims. (29) That same month, the Ministry of Defense instructed FARDC prosecutors to open an investigation into the actions of the FARDC's 2105th Regiment for the alleged abduction and rape of at least 17 children in Tshikapa, Kasai Province. (29) Despite the regiment commander's alleged interference with the investigation, in November FARDC prosecutors detained 10 soldiers from the 2105th on charges of rape and abduction of minors. Two of the soldiers were in detention at the end of the reporting period, while eight more remained under investigation; measures to address the global COVID-19 pandemic reportedly delayed court proceedings in this case during the first half of 2020. (29,63,77) In addition, the government's joint investigation with the UN continued in 2019 against several individuals charged with child recruitment, leading to the arrest of at least four armed group commanders who are awaiting trial in prison. (29,78,79)

Despite these positive steps, impunity for abuses perpetrated by FARDC officials or regiments remained a significant concern, as the government did not consistently hold perpetrators accountable, and some officials were complicit in helping suspects avoid prosecution. (29) In 2018, the FARDC was linked to two cases of use of children in supporting roles, included concubinage and forced labor. The commander responsible for these offenses was redeployed to a different regiment in 2019 and not otherwise been held accountable. (3) Additionally, military prosecutors investigating Colonel Ramazani Lubinga, former commander of the 601st Regiment, issued a warrant for his arrest for allegedly recruiting child soldiers during the M23 rebellion; however, Colonel Ramazani's military superiors refused to comply. (29)

In North Kivu, FARDC elements collaborated with *Nduma Défense du Congo-Rénové* (NDC-R), a proxy armed group that continued to recruit children into its ranks. (78,79) According to the UN, Congolese forces, including senior FARDC command, allowed the group to move freely throughout the province, and tolerated NDC-R's use of FARDC uniforms. Colonel Yves Kijenge, FARDC commander of the 3411th Regiment, also supplied the group with weapons and ammunition. (29,78) This arrangement has allowed the group to collect revenue through illegal taxation schemes and control of lucrative gold mining sites. (29,63,78,79) In June 2019, military prosecutors in North Kivu issued a warrant for the arrest of U.S.-sanctioned Congolese "General" Shimiray Mwissa Guidon for child recruitment, mass rape, and other crimes committed between 2014 and 2019 as leader of the NDC-R. (29,79) Prosecutors further alleged that high-ranking FARDC commanders protected Guidon during this period. However, while the warrant was never executed, in July 2020 Guidon was deposed by his second-in-command, Gilbert Chuo Bwira. (80,81)

Members of the national police and government-backed armed groups carried out extrajudicial killings of civilians, including children, for their perceived affiliation with or support for non-state armed groups. (32,66,82-84) The government also detained 111 children for their alleged association with armed groups for periods between 3 to 60 days, despite a 2012 directive requiring that all children detained for their association with armed groups be immediately transferred to the UN. (28-30,32,66) Local detention cells suffer from overcrowding, lack of food and health services, and poor sanitation. (29)

In addition, the FARDC deployed a battalion to dismantle illegal ASM sites in the southeast, where working conditions are hazardous and child labor is prevalent. In 2019, soldiers cleared at least 12,000 miners from industrial cobalt and copper concessions, reportedly torching dozens of homes and ransacking a school in the process. (37,85,86) The FARDC, mining police, and private security forces, including those guarding large-scale mining concessions, reportedly subjected child laborers on ASM sites to extortion and physical abuse. (38) There is no evidence the government took action to address these abuses.

In January 2020, police in Lubumbashi arrested three men accused of running a child trafficking ring. Twenty-two child victims were freed during the arrest. (29) During the reporting period, the DRC's Juvenile Justice Courts, special courts designed to make the criminal justice system more accessible to child complainants as well as to provide additional protections to child defendants, heard cases involving 46,250 children. These included prosecutions of child trafficking and child commercial sexual exploitation. (29)

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Nevertheless, some implementing decrees for the Child Protection Code have not been adopted. Without these decrees, multiple provisions, including the provision on light work, cannot be enforced. Penalties for criminal violations related to the worst forms of child labor—including the use of children in armed conflict—are 1 to 3 years of imprisonment with fines of up to \$123 (200,000 CDF), which are insufficient to serve as deterrents. (3,15,22,50,51,53,87,88)

Ultimately, however, poor coordination in conducting investigations, collecting data, and providing services to victims continues to hinder the government’s ability to adequately combat the worst forms of child labor. (3,31) Research indicates that both the military and civilian justice systems lack the capacity and resources to investigate and prosecute child labor violations. (4,22,66)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms 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 lack of coordination among agencies.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Committee to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor (NCCL)	Oversees the National Action Plan to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor and monitors its implementation. (84,89) Led by the MOL and includes representatives from 12 other ministries, local NGOs, and civil society. (14,84,89) In 2019, convened an inter-ministerial meeting at which the implementation plan for the USDOL Combatting Child Labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Cobalt Industry project was formally adopted. (15,90)
Child Soldier Monitoring, Verification, Demobilization, Reintegration Mechanisms	Includes the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Commission (UEPN-DDR), which coordinates verification and release of children associated with armed groups. Working with the MOGF, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), UNICEF, and NGOs, UEPN-DDR refers demobilized child soldiers to social services providers for family reunification and reinsertion. (14,31,69) The commission is led by MOD’s Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups unit. (31,69) Additionally, the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting (CTFMR), which is co-chaired by the UN, documents all grave violations committed against children. With cooperation from MOD, CTFMR also engaged directly with armed group commanders, securing the voluntary release of 920 children in 2019. As of February 2020, 27 armed group commanders had committed to release children recruited into their ranks. (29) Between July and September 2019, CTFMR trained 429 officers from the police and from the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) on child protection, age verification, and preventing child recruitment and other grave violations. (28)
Joint Technical Working Group	Coordinates the implementation of the UN Child Soldiers Action Plan and activities at the provincial level in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Orientale provinces. Led by the MOGF and includes representatives from four other ministries and the UN. (3,5,91) In 2019, held two meetings to discuss preparations for the 7th report on the FARDC Action Plan and FARDC recruitment training. Additionally, organized training on child soldier screening, monitoring, verification, and demobilization processes, and participated in advocacy events. (3,28,31,32)
Inter-ministerial Commission Responsible for Addressing the Issue of Child Labor in Mines and on Mine Sites in DRC	Coordinates efforts to eradicate child labor in the DRC’s mining sector and serves as an advisor to other ministries combating child labor in mining. In 2019, announced a partnership with the USDOL to combat child labor in the mining sector. (15,37)
Agency for Prevention and the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons (APLTP)*	Advocates on behalf of victims, and investigates, prosecutes, and sentences traffickers, including government officials complicit in human trafficking. (29) Embedded in the Office of the Presidency and replaces a previous trafficking in persons working group. Includes government officials from the Congolese National Police and FARDC, local NGOs, and international organizations who formulate, coordinate, monitor, and evaluate government efforts to combat human trafficking. (29) Shelters managed by APLTP provided holistic care to an estimated 650 trafficking victims in 2019, many of whom were children. APLTP and Ministry of Interior officials also worked to standardize data collection and reporting, and used standard templates to report victim identification, investigations, prosecutions, and convictions. (29) Officials from the APLTP, members of the judiciary, Congolese National Police, Ministry of Mines, and Ministry of Social Affairs officials participated in four anti-trafficking trainings during the reporting period. (29)

* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

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The creation of the APLTP in April 2019 addressed a long-standing need to increase coordination among various anti-human trafficking actors within the government. (29) Nevertheless, overlapping objectives and duplication of efforts, combined with a lack of resources and trained personnel, may have impeded the government's ability to coordinate actions to combat the worst forms of child labor. (24,31) In addition, the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Commission is meant to take the lead on child soldier issues; however, research indicates that in practice, the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting often takes the lead. (31)

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 whether relevant policies were active.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2012–2020)	Developed by the NCCL in consultation with UNICEF to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the DRC by the end of 2020. (10,92) Promotes the enforcement of laws prohibiting the worst forms of child labor; universal primary education; monitoring and evaluation efforts; and improved coordination of stakeholders. Also seeks to raise awareness of the worst forms of child labor, empower communities to stop child labor practices, and provide prevention and reintegration services. (10,92) No activities were implemented in 2019 due to a lack of funding. (14)
Child Soldiers Action Plans	Includes UEPN-DDR's National Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDR III) plan, which aims to provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to demobilized combatants, including children. (3,95-97) DDR III is implemented with UN and international support, and within the 2013 Framework Agreement for Peace, Security, and Cooperation for the DRC and the Great Lakes Region. (96,98,99) Requires children separated from armed groups to be immediately transferred to UNICEF. (31) In 2019, UNICEF, through its partners, provided social services to 3,107 children formerly associated with armed groups. (29,32) The Action Plan to End the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers (Child Soldiers Action Plan), meanwhile, is a UN-backed plan that aims to prevent and end the use of children in armed forces, provide support and reintegration services, pursue accountability for perpetrators, and create a partnership framework for the UN and the government. (93,94) Includes standard operating procedures for age verification to help FARDC avoid underage recruitment. (2,3,5) During the reporting period, provided training on child protection issues to members of FARDC and police officers. (29,32) Additionally, the FARDC continued to screen new recruits, identifying and removing 141 children from its ranks in 2019. (28) MONUSCO and the government also worked with leaders of non-state armed groups to sign action plans to end the recruitment of children and establish an implementing mechanism. As of February 2020, 27 additional non-state armed groups have pledged to sign similar action plans. (7,30,31)
Action Plans to Address Child Labor in Mining	The National Sectoral Strategy to Combat Child Labor in Artisanal Mines and Artisanal Mining Sites (2017–2025), developed by the Ministry of Mines, seeks to eradicate child labor in artisanal mining by 2025. The strategy aims to strengthen relevant laws, improve data collection on the prevalence of child labor in the mining sector, promote responsible sourcing regulations, improve child protection measures, and build stakeholder capacity to address these issues. (100) In November 2019, the Ministry of Mines organized a workshop to operationalize the strategy. (29) More broadly, the Inter-Ministerial Commission's Triennial Action Plan (2017–2020) aspires to eradicate child labor in mining by 2020, particularly in the tin, tantalum, tungsten, cobalt, and copper sectors by monitoring existing policies and strengthening measures to remove children from mining sites. (101) The government is also cooperating with the Public Private Alliance for Responsible Minerals Trade to end child labor in the cobalt sector. (29)
APLTP's National Action Plan (2020–2024)†	Addresses all forms of trafficking in persons, including foreign born and domestic victims, and child soldiers. (29) Aims to prevent human trafficking through national awareness-raising programs and training government officials to recognize and refer trafficking cases to the appropriate authorities. Includes community radio messaging in multiple languages, the direction of public awareness campaign films, and the creation of a free trafficking-in-persons resource library to be hosted on the websites of the offices of the Presidency and the Ministry of Justice. (29) The National Strategy and accompanying 2020–2024 anti-trafficking National Action Plan, both finalized during the year, are the first such guidance documents in DRC's history. (29)
National Action Plan Against Sexual Violence in Conflict	Supports UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, which aims to prevent the recruitment of children, particularly girls, into armed groups; to provide social services upon their release; and to ensure perpetrators are prosecuted. (103,104) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.

† Program was launched during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (21,22,105,106)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Mines organized a workshop to operationalize its National Strategy to Combat Child Labor in the Mining Sector. The strategy supports provisions in the 2018 mining law outlawing

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work in mines by children under age 18. (15,29) Additionally, the government allocated \$10.8 million (19 billion Congolese Francs) to the Ministry of Social Affairs to reduce child labor in the mining sector. (15) However, while the DRC has developed a number of action plans to combat child labor, only some received dedicated funding. (20,23,31,37)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem in all relevant sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Programs to Support Vulnerable Children†	Government and donor-supported projects that aim to improve child protection. Includes a \$4 million Government of Japan-funded program that aims to provide education, vocational training, reintegration kits, and school feeding programs to 13,000 children and construct a training center for youth in North Kivu Province; a \$97 million Government of Canada-funded program that aims to assist 95,000 at-risk youth living near mining sites; and a Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, and Humanitarian Affairs and NGO program to reintegrate children removed from the street into communities and reunify children formerly associated with armed groups with their families. (3,14,31,107) The government-run Center for the Transit and Orientation of Young Children in North Kivu Province provides psychological counseling and basic education and job skills training to ex-child soldiers. During the reporting period, the center supervised and helped reintegrate 400 children who had left armed groups. (29)
USDOL-Funded Projects	Includes Measurement, Awareness-Raising, and Policy Engagement (MAP 16) Project on Child Labor and Forced Labor, a \$20 million project implemented by the ILO to conduct research and develop new survey methodologies, improve awareness, strengthen policies and government capacity, and promote partnerships to combat child labor and forced labor. Along with IOM and the Walk Free Foundation, the MAP 16 project conducted research on forced labor, including forced child labor, in conflict zones in the DRC in 2018. The research is due to be published in 2020. (108) Also includes Combatting Child Labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Cobalt Industry (2018–2021), a \$2.5 million project implemented by the ILO in Kolwezi, Lualaba Province aimed at reducing child labor and improving working conditions in the mining sector. (90,109) During the reporting period, the National Committee to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor formally adopted the project's implementation plan. (15,90) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.
World Bank-Funded Projects	Projects in support of re-establishing peace and stability. Includes Reinsertion and Reintegration Project (2015–2019), a \$21 million project that aims to assist with social reintegration for the child combatants identified as part of DDR III; Human Development Systems Strengthening (2014–2020), a \$46.8 million project that aims to increase birth registration and improve school infrastructure; and Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) (2017–2021), a \$100 million project that aims to improve the quality of primary school education. (99,110-112) By October 2019, the Human Development Systems Strengthening project had provided 4,939 children with birth registration certificates. As of May 2019, the Reinsertion and Reintegration Project had demobilized 4,700 combatants since it began implementation in 2016. (113-115)

† Program is funded by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (116,117)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Defense worked closely with the UN to identify and remove child recruits from FARDC. (29) However, the scope of child disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs remains insufficient. The reintegration process is slow, funding is inadequate, and collaboration between partners is weak. (3,22,43,118,119) Children separated from armed groups remain vulnerable to re-recruitment and stigmatization. Girls, who make up an estimated 30 to 40 percent of children associated with armed groups, often survive prolonged sexual and physical abuse in captivity and face social exclusion upon their return. Because this cycle of rejection increases their risk of re-recruitment, girls should be specifically targeted in the DDR process (5,43,118-121) Research also indicates that the government needs to strengthen its efforts to assist street children and implement programs specifically designed to assist children engaged in forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation. (4,22,23,43)

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 the DRC (Table 11).

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Establish by law a compulsory education age that extends to the minimum age for employment.	2013 – 2019
Enforcement	Collect and publish complete data related to criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of investigations conducted, convictions secured, and penalties imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2019
	Fund civil and criminal enforcement agencies responsible for conducting inspections or investigations, and ensure labor inspectors have adequate resources and transportation to conduct worksite inspections throughout the country.	2015 – 2019
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice and ensure that inspectors receive adequate training and funding to carry out their duties.	2011 – 2019
	Issue appropriate decrees to ensure that enacted laws are implemented, including those related to light work provisions.	2009 – 2019
	Increase penalties for the worst forms of child labor so they are sufficiently stringent to serve as a deterrent.	2013 – 2019
	End FARDC support for non-state armed groups that recruit children and hold perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor, including child soldiering, accountable.	2017 – 2019
	Ensure the criminal justice system has the resources to investigate and prosecute child labor violations, and judges, prosecutors, and investigators receive training on new and existing laws on the worst forms of child labor.	2011 – 2019
	Improve coordination among relevant criminal enforcement agencies in conducting investigations, collecting data, and providing services to victims.	2017 – 2019
	Cease the practice of subjecting children to physical violence and detention for their alleged association with armed groups, and ensure that enforcement officials do not carry out extrajudicial killings.	2015 – 2019
	Ensure security forces do not subject children to human rights violations, including extortion and physical abuse, when dismantling artisanal small-scale mining operations, and hold them accountable if found to engage in such behavior.	2019
Coordination	Improve coordination among relevant ministries to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure that they receive adequate resources and trained personnel to combat the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking.	2015 – 2019
	Ensure that Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDR III) Commission is able to coordinate the implementation of the DDR III program as intended.	2015 – 2019
Government Policies	Ensure all relevant policies, national action plans, and sectoral strategies to address the worst forms of child labor are adopted, funded, and implemented as intended.	2011 – 2019
Social Programs	Conduct a stand-alone child labor survey to inform child labor policies and practices.	2013 – 2019
	Improve access to education by ensuring that all children are registered at birth or are issued identification documents.	2012 – 2019
Social Programs	Improve access to education for all children by regulating classroom size, training additional teachers, building additional schools, and ensuring that schools are safe and students are not subjected to sexual abuse or forcible recruitment while at or on their way to school. Make additional efforts to prevent schools from being attacked and occupied by armed groups.	2012 – 2019
	Expand efforts to address the needs of demobilized children and incorporate stigmatization, gender, and re-recruitment concerns into programs to reintegrate such children.	2009 – 2019
	Establish or expand social programs designed to assist children engaged in forced labor in agriculture, street work, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation, and implement existing programs as intended.	2009 – 2019

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