

In 2019, Lebanon made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Social Affairs began implementing the National Action Plan to End Street Begging by Children with a public outreach program, and the Ministry of Labor took steps to review the Labor Code with the goal of raising the minimum age for work to 15, which would align with Lebanon's compulsory education age. Moreover, the Internal Security Forces institutionalized entry training for its cadets on child rights and protection. In addition, the government improved access to education with a policy allowing all refugees to enroll in public schools regardless of whether they have the required documentation for school enrollment. However, children in Lebanon engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in construction and in forced labor in agriculture. Children also engage in child labor in the production of potatoes and tobacco. Laws related to forced labor do not meet international standards as there is no legislative provision that provides criminal penalties for forced labor, and debt bondage is not criminally prohibited. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor's budget was unable to cover equipment, personnel, and transport costs to conduct inspections. In addition, labor inspectors do not have the authority to inspect informal workplaces, where child labor in Lebanon is most prominent, and programs targeting child labor remained insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Lebanon engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in construction and in forced labor in agriculture. (1-5) Children also engage in child labor in the production of potatoes and tobacco. (2,3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Lebanon. 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	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (6)
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2020. (7)

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 picking potatoes, cucumbers, almonds, plums, olives, beans, figs, grapes, eggplants, and cannabis (2,3,8-13)
	Production of tobacco† (14,15)
	Fishing, activities unknown (16,17)
Industry	Construction,† including carpentry, tiling, and welding† (2,3,9,12,14,18,19)
	Working in cement factories† (18,20)
	Making handicrafts (16,17)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Industry	Working in aluminum factories (9,21)
	Working in textile factories (22,23)
Services	Street work,† including begging, street vending, portering, washing cars, scavenging garbage,† and shining shoes (3,5,9,12,24-27)
	Maintenance and repair of motor vehicles,† and painting† (9,12,16,23,25)
	Domestic work† (9,12,16,28)
	Cleaning sewage† and collecting waste materials, including scrap metal (12,16)
	Food service,† including working as waiters (2,9,15)
	Cleaning marketplaces (14)
	Working in slaughterhouses† and butcheries (16)
	Working in small shops (2,16,25)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking or production, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and arms dealing (3,19,24,25,29)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,25,30)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (16,23,30-33)
	Forced labor in agriculture, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-4,12,16)
	Forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (4,34)

† 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.

Child labor has increased, and conditions that affect Lebanese and Syrian refugee children have worsened since the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon that began in 2011. A national economic crisis that began the second half of 2019 has further exacerbated these conditions and reduced the government’s capacity to address them. (13,17,35) As of October 2019, more than 914,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon were registered with UNHCR, and more than half of them were children. (36) Child labor is also prevalent in other refugee communities in Lebanon, including the Palestinian and Iraqi communities. (17,37)

Lebanon experienced protracted economic and political crises since anti-government protests began on October 17, 2019, and the government resigned on October 29, 2019. Sources indicate that other labor reforms have taken precedence over child labor. (3) Near the end of the reporting period, sources described an increase in child begging, which makes children more vulnerable to hazards associated with street work. (3) Some boys are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. (19,38) Working on the streets is especially common among refugee children from Syria, including Palestinians from Syria. (24)

The UN reported that several armed groups recruited children to be used as guards or in support roles, such as in carrying weapons or food. (34)

Syrian refugee children are also subjected to forced labor in agriculture. (1,2,16,30) Some Syrian refugee children and their families in the Bekaa Valley are kept in bonded labor in agriculture to pay for makeshift dwellings provided by landowners. (1,13,30,39) A 2019 American University of Beirut survey reported that nearly 75 percent of Syrian refugee children working in the Bekaa Valley do so in agriculture. (40) Adult Syrian refugees face legal restrictions that allow them to only work in agriculture, construction, and sanitation. (16,41) To work legally, they also need to be registered with the UNHCR or have local sponsors. (41) These restrictions on adults make children vulnerable to child labor. (12,42)




In the last few years, the government waived fees for public primary schools and opened second shifts in about 240 schools. (14) In 2019, the government adopted an open policy of admitting all refugee children regardless of whether they have the required documentation for school enrollment. (3) Children in Lebanon, particularly Syrian refugee children, face barriers to accessing education, including the cost of transportation and supplies, occupation of schools by armed groups or use as shelters, fear of passing checkpoints or of violence, lack of private sanitation facilities for girls, discrimination, bullying, corporal punishment, and a different curriculum in Lebanon than in their country of origin. (2,14,15,43,44) However, the public school system in Lebanon lacks the capacity to accommodate the large number of school-age Syrian refugee children. (16) Nonetheless, some refugees have been denied access to schools. (3) Moreover, students without documentation

are only eligible to receive a certificate, rather than a diploma, causing some undocumented students to drop out. (3) More than 50 percent of Syrian refugee children and 35 percent of Palestinian refugee children were not enrolled in formal education. (25,45,46) Children with disabilities, particularly refugee children, were unable to attend school due to insufficient accessibility or inadequacy of facilities, lack of specialized facilities, or unavailability of tailored services for children with disabilities. (44,47) Lebanese and refugee children who work in agriculture often do not attend school during harvesting and planting seasons. (48,49) One local organization observed a direct correlation between school dropout rates and an increase in child labor. (25)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Lebanon has ratified most 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 Lebanon's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of debt bondage.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 22 of the Labor Code (50)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of Decree No. 8987 (51)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Annex I of Decree No. 8987 (16,51)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Article 8 of Decree No. 3855; Article 569 of the Penal Code (52,53)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 586.1 and 586.5 of the Penal Code (53)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 506, 523, 525–527, 586.1, and 586.5 of the Penal Code; Decree No. 8987 of 2012 (51,53)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 586.1, 586.5, and 618 of the Penal Code; Article 13 of the Law on Drugs (53,54)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 30 of the National Defense Law (55)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 586.1 of the Penal Code; Annex I of Decree No. 8987 (51,53)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Article 49 of the Education Law (56)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 49 of the Education Law (56)

* No conscription (57)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (37)

The Labor Code only applies to workers who perform work in industrial, trading, or agricultural enterprises and excludes domestic work and non-industrial, non-trade agriculture. (50) This does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age to work.

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In Lebanon, basic education is compulsory. (56) Children generally complete basic education at age 15. (37) The minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. In 2019, the Minister of Labor formed a drafting committee to review and amend the Labor Code with the goal of raising the minimum age for work to age 15, bringing it in line with the compulsory education age. The committee did not produce a draft by the end of the reporting period. (3)

Laws related to forced labor are insufficient because there is no legislative provision that provides criminal penalties for the exaction of forced labor, and debt bondage is not criminally prohibited. (53,58)

The law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as the use of children in the production of pornography is not criminally prohibited. (51,53)

Government officials have clarified that although Article 610 of the Penal Code criminalizes begging, Article 26 of the Delinquent Juveniles Law, which takes precedence over the Penal Code, stipulates that in cases of begging, the child is considered in danger and entitled to receive protective measures. (53,59,60)

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

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor	Enforces child labor laws through desk review and workplace inspections. Acts as government focal point for child labor issues and hosts the National Steering Committee on Child Labor. (3) The Ministry's Child Labor Unit raises public awareness about child labor and the right to education. Receives complaints on child labor violations on its Child Labor Unit hotline. (3) In 2019, the Minister of Labor participated in the launch of a report on child labor in the Bekaa Valley. (3)
Internal Security Forces	Enforces laws regarding child labor through the Anti-Human Trafficking and Morals Protection Bureau. (3)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes violations of the Penal Code in coordination with the Internal Security Forces. Maintains general data and statistics on criminal violations involving child labor. (3) Refers at-risk children to shelters and protection services. Coordinates, through signed agreements, with civil society organizations to provide social workers who oversee court proceedings involving juveniles and deliver services to them, including children engaged in begging. (3)
Ministry of Social Affairs	Refers children identified by the Internal Security Forces and the Ministry of Justice to protective institutions, such as health centers. Refers children to shelters through its Higher Council for Childhood. (3)
Directorate of General Security	Focuses on immigration and border protection. Works with farmers union to address child labor in agriculture. (3)

According to local observers, the Ministry of Labor's hotline is not fully functional and works for a limited number of hours on official workdays. It does not have a system to register incoming calls. (25)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Lebanon took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including penalty assessment authorization.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown (16)	34 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (61)	No (61)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (16)	Yes (3)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	No (16)	Unknown (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (61)	Yes (61)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (16)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (16)	Yes (3)

In 2019, the Ministry of Labor and the Directorate of General Security held training sessions on child labor, and additionally coordinated inspection patrols to document and stop child labor. (3) However, based on available information, the Ministry did not cover the costs of equipment and transportation needed by labor inspectors to carry out their duties and the child labor unit only includes one staff member, which is insufficient. (3) Child labor inspections are generally a result of a complaint. (3) Government officials have expressed frustration that they can only conduct inspections in formal places of employment, where child labor is nearly non-existent (3,16,17,62)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Lebanon’s workforce, which includes more than 2.1 million workers. (3,63) According to the ILO’s technical advice of 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Lebanon would employ about 144 labor inspectors. (64,65) Despite the need for more inspectors, the deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon has led to a hiring freeze. (3)

The government does not publicly release information on its labor law enforcement efforts. (16)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Lebanon 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	Yes (16)	Yes (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (16)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (16)	10 (3)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (16)	8 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (16)	7 (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (16)	Unknown (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (16)	Yes (3)

In 2019, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) provided training to 136 officers on child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. It also institutionalized initial training on child rights and protection at the ISF Academy. (3) The ISF, the Lebanese Armed Forces, and the Directorate of General Security received training on countering human trafficking. (66) In addition, municipal police in the Bekaa Valley received training on child labor in 2019. (3)

The ISF investigated 10 cases of child labor and found 8 child victims being used for begging and selling flowers, and 1 case of a man attempting to sell his son. It referred seven adults to the judiciary and victims were referred to appropriate service providers. (3) The number of convictions is unavailable because there is no centralized record system in the Ministry of Justice. (66)

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Despite its efforts, the ISF's anti-trafficking unit was underfunded and understaffed during the reporting period and had no field offices outside of Beirut. (67) The Ministry of Justice has stated that a lack of sufficient human resources hindered the government's ability to address child labor. (17)

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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Raises awareness; coordinates efforts among government agencies; establishes standard practices; develops, enforces, and recommends changes; and ensures that government agencies comply with the law. Led by the Minister of Labor, includes representatives from six other ministries and other institutions and international organizations. (17) Sources indicate that the National Steering Committee on Child Labor did not meet in 2019 after meeting only once in 2018. (3)
National Steering Committee on Trafficking in Persons	Coordinates efforts against human trafficking, including child trafficking. Based at the Ministry of Labor and meets on a monthly basis. (17) Active in 2019. (4)
UNICEF and UNHCR	Coordinates efforts to address the needs of children affected by the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. UN representatives identify crucial concerns, including factors that make children vulnerable to child labor. (17) Makes recommendations to the government on the use of resources, including referral services. (17) UN agencies and international and local NGOs coordinate child protection efforts through Child Protection Working Groups. (16) Active in 2019. (68)

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 implementation.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2013–2019)	Establishes strategies for addressing child labor, including improving enforcement of child labor laws and expanding access to education. (39,69) In 2019, the Ministry of Labor maintained contact with ILO, NGOs, and international stakeholders. (3)
Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon	Provides the policy framework for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict. (43) Sources indicate there was minimal implementation of this policy during the reporting period. (47)
Policy for the Protection of Students in the School Environment	Protects children's right to education and promotes non-violence in schools by establishing mechanisms to receive complaints of violence, mistreatment, and bullying and addresses those cases while safeguarding children's privacy. Trains school staff and officials on identifying risk factors. (70,71) In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in cooperation with UNICEF, trained 4,700 public school teachers in the implementation of this policy. (36)
National Action Plan to End Street Begging by Children†	Seeks to end child begging by ensuring legal protection for street children, building capacity to protect street children, rehabilitating and reintegrating street children, and conducting outreach regarding the problem. (3) The Ministry of Social Affairs began its outreach campaign under the slogan "you are not helping them, you are aiding in their exploitation." It has produced posters, flyers, and a video; however, implementation of the plan halted following the resignation of the government in October 2019. (3,72)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Child Protection Program	Joint program by UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Addresses child labor through interventions, including providing psychological counseling, raising awareness among employers, and working with employers to decrease working hours for children and improve working conditions. (48) In 2019, UNICEF worked with government agencies and civil society organizations to provide case management and psychosocial support to children, including children working on the streets. (3,36)
Reaching All Children through Education (RACE II) (2017–2021)	Donor-funded 5-year project, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and partners to ensure quality education opportunities for children ages 3 to 18, regardless of nationality, through holistic interventions that address the demand and availability of quality public education, including non-formal education. (73) Active in 2019. (3)
National Poverty Alleviation Program†	Funded by the government and foreign donors, this program housed at the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Social Affairs provides WFP food vouchers (\$27 per month) for each member of poor families. It also provides school tuition and book costs for secondary school students from 43,000 poor families. (47) In 2019, the World Bank worked with the Government of Lebanon to scale up this program to provide cash transfers for food and education to 150,000 poor Lebanese families in 2020, although this is unlikely to begin until fall 2020. (47)

† Program is funded by the Government of Lebanon.

Some officials are reluctant to remove children trafficked by their families because of a perceived lack of social services should the child be taken from the family. (5)

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 Lebanon (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict, which the government signed in 2002.	2013 – 2019
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2019
	Ensure the minimum age for work applies to all children, including informal workers, domestic workers, and all agricultural workers.	2019
	Ensure that the use of a child in commercial sexual exploitation is criminally prohibited.	2019
	Ensure that forced labor and debt bondage are criminally prohibited.	2015 – 2019
Enforcement	Ensure that there is an adequate mechanism to receive and log child labor complaints and refer them for investigation.	2017 – 2019
	Track and publish information on labor law enforcement, including funding and inspections.	2009 – 2019
	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties.	2015 – 2019
	Provide Ministry of Labor inspectors with proper funding and necessary transportation.	2011 – 2019
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2016 – 2019
	Publish information on criminal enforcement of child labor laws, including convictions.	2009 – 2019
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies have the necessary funding and staff to investigate and prosecute criminal cases of child labor, in accordance with the law.	2017 – 2019
Coordination	Ensure that the National Steering Committee on Child Labor meets and carries out its duties.	2019
Government Policies	Ensure that the Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon is implemented, and that children previously associated with armed conflict receive social and rehabilitation services.	2017 – 2019
Social Programs	Ensure access to public education for all children.	2010 – 2019
	Ensure that the National Poverty Alleviation Program is implemented.	2017 – 2019
	Expand programs to fully address the extent of child labor.	2013 – 2019

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