

In 2019, Liberia made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Justice successfully prosecuted one case of child trafficking and the government endorsed the National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor. However, children in Liberia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of rubber and the mining of gold and diamonds. In addition, Liberia has yet to accede to the UN CRC Protocol on Armed Conflict and the Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography. The compulsory education age is lower than the minimum age for work, making children age 15 vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are not required to attend school nor legally permitted to work. Social programs are not sufficient to address the scope of the problem in the country.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Liberia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1) Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of rubber and the mining of gold and diamonds. (2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Liberia.

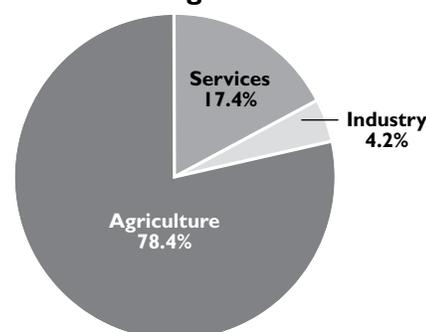
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	16.6 (136,340)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	75.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	14.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		60.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Labour Force Survey (LFS), 2010. (4)

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	Production of rubber, including cutting trees with machetes and using acid (1,2,5,6)
	Production of charcoal (2)
	Farming activities, including production of cocoa, coffee, cassava, and sugarcane (7)
Industry	Mining† diamonds and gold activities, including washing gravel and using mercury and cyanide (1,8,9)
	Cutting and crushing stone (2,5,6,10)
	Construction, including carrying heavy loads† (2,5,6)
Services	Domestic work (6)
	Street work, including vending, begging, hawking goods, and carrying heavy loads (5,6,11-13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (14)
	Forced labor in domestic work, street vending, mining, begging, and work on small rubber plantations, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,9)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,15)

† 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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While the government has yet to collect comprehensive data on child labor activities to inform policies and social programs, there are reports that children in rural communities engage in rubber tapping and coal burning activities while children in cities and surrounding urban communities crush rocks, engage in domestic work, and sell goods. (10) Children are also generally transported from Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone for work. (1,5,6)

Section 9 of the Children's Law mandates free basic education from grades one to nine, but the cost of uniforms, transportation, books, and school supplies limits access to education for some children. For secondary school students (grades 10–12), reports indicate there is a shortage of teachers, insufficient learning materials, a lack of educational facilities, and inadequate transportation, all of which limit access to education. (6) In addition, some teachers sexually exploit students in exchange for the promise of good grades, resulting in children avoiding or dropping out of school. (6,7) Research also indicates the ongoing practice of temporarily removing boys and girls from formal schooling to participate in initiation rituals that transition a child into adulthood. Many children may not return to school after their participation in these initiation ceremonies, making them more vulnerable to child labor. (6,16)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Liberia has ratified some 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 Liberia's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the 1-year break between the compulsory education age and the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No		Section 74 of the Labor Law, Article 21.2 of the Decent Work Act (17,18)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 7, Section 9.1 of the Children's Law (19)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 21.4 of the Decent Work Act (5,18)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 12 of the Constitution; Article 2.2 of the Decent Work Act; Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (19-21)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (19,21)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3, Section 21 of the Children's Law; Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (18,19,21)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Chapter 16 of the Penal Law (18)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (19)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (19)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (19)
Compulsory Education Age	No	14	Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law; Chapter 4 of the Education Reform Act (19,22)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law (19)

* No conscription (23)

The minimum age for work is not in compliance with international standards because it allows children younger than 16 to engage in work as long as it is outside of school hours, the employer keeps records of the child's schooling, and the child is literate and attends school regularly. Because of this, children of any age may be vulnerable to child labor. Although the Decent Work Act prohibits children younger than 15 from working full-time, it does not prevent children below this age from engaging in part-time employment. (19,22)

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, the exceptionally low number of worksite inspections conducted in the informal sector may impede the enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Conducts worksite inspections and addresses child labor violations. (5)
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP)	Acts as the lead advisory agency on policy formulation, coordination, and monitoring of child protection through its Children Protection and Development Division. Monitors the government's efforts on compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN CRC, and the African Union protocols on women and children. (6,24,25)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Promotes and executes the rule of law for public safety, including the prosecution of child labor perpetrators. (26)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, the exceptionally low number of worksite inspections reported to have been conducted at the national level in Liberia 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 (9)	Unknown (25)
Number of Labor Inspectors	50 (9)	51 (25)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (9)	No (25)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (9)	Yes (25)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A (25)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (9)	Unknown (25)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	450 (9)	236 (25)
Number Conducted at Worksite	50 (9)	236 (25)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (9)	Unknown (25)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (9)	Unknown (25)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (9)	Unknown (25)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Yes (25)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (9)	Yes (25)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (9)	Yes (25)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Yes (25)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (9)	Yes (25)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Unknown (25)

In January and April 2019, labor inspectors participated in two trainings on the development of guidelines for child labor monitoring systems. (25,27) Generally, labor inspections are only conducted in the formal sector and not in the informal sector where children are more likely to be engaged in child labor. (2) In addition, the lack of funding and logistical support results in the underutilization of the labor inspectorate's complaint mechanism. (6,27) Although inspectors cannot assess penalties, they can impose corrective measures such as issuing notices of compliance and filing a complaint with the hearing board. (6,27) The lack of penalty assessment authorization, limited funding, and insufficient fines, combined with poor opportunities for revenue generation in the informal sector, hamper the inspectorate's enforcement of child labor laws. (2,6,19,27)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Liberia took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Liberia National Police (LNP) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including financial resource allocation.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown	Unknown (25)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	N/A (25)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (9)	Unknown (25)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown (25)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	Unknown (25)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	2 (25)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	1 (25)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown (25)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (25)

In May 2019, the state successfully prosecuted a woman for exploiting two children in street vending. She received a suspended sentence in light of the time she spent in prison awaiting trial and on the conditions that she report to the sheriff's office twice a month for 6 months, that she not have any children other than her own living with her, and that she submit to inspections of her residence by the sheriff. (27)

In addition, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) reported receiving 2,220 calls to the anti-trafficking hotline between April 1, 2019 and February 14, 2020. It identified 14 possible cases of human trafficking and referred them to the LNP, although it is not known how many of these cases involved children. (27)

Despite these efforts, research indicates the LNP's Women and Children Protection Section had limited training and financial and physical resources, which hampered its ability to carry out investigations and other enforcement duties. (5,27,28) In addition, child labor is typically addressed as an issue of child endangerment, thereby causing a lack of reliable data on violations of child labor laws. (2,5)

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 a lack of financial support from the National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL)	Coordinates government and civil society activities concerning child labor. Led by MOL and comprising representatives from 16 organizations, including international and civil society organizations. (28) Assists in coordinating child labor investigations. (29) Seeks to reform national child labor laws and create a national child labor database, which would assist surveys on the extent of child labor issues in Liberia. (28) In 2019, NACOMAL participated in two trainings and chaired two meetings of the National Steering Committee. (25)
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Implements child labor policies. Chaired by NACOMAL and comprising government officials and workers' organizations. (5) Includes four subcommittees on resource mobilization, advocacy, training and legal development, and monitoring and evaluation. Met twice in 2019. (25)
Child Protection Network	Coordinates child protection efforts, including child labor and human trafficking, and refers child victims of abuse to social services providers with support from international and national organizations. Chaired by the MOGCSF, and comprising MOL, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the LNP's Women and Children Protection Section, civil society organizations, and several NGOs. (25) In 2019, stakeholders met regularly throughout 10 months of the year. (25)
Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force	Coordinates anti-trafficking activities. Chaired by MOL, comprising of representatives from the Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, the Liberia National Police (LNP); MOJ; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Internal Affairs; as well as civil society organizations. (6) Met regularly during the reporting period and organized public awareness campaigns. (25)

During 2019, NACOMAL reported it had a budget for salaries but no budget allocated for program activities. (9)

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 a lack of implementation.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor†	Aims to reduce child labor and the worst forms of child labor by 50 percent by 2030 through three strategic objectives, including increasing public awareness on the causes and consequences of the worst forms of child labor, strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks to reduce child labor, and increasing social services and protection for children of vulnerable households. The government endorsed this plan in March of 2019. (30)
National Action Plan for Trafficking in Persons (2019–2024)†	Outlines the government anti-trafficking efforts, including those for child victims, and creates benchmark goals related to trafficking in person. (9,31) Establishes roles and responsibilities for coordinating government assistance to human trafficking victims and provides shelter and care to children who may have been human trafficking victims. (31)
National Child Welfare and Protection Policy	Focuses on the implementation and enforcement of existing child protection laws. (6) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Child Welfare and Protection Policy.
National Social Welfare Policy	Prioritizes the development of action plans and policies that target children engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking. (33) Research could not determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Social Welfare Policy during the reporting year.

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Child labor elimination and prevention strategies are not included in the Revised National Youth Policy, the Education Sector Plan, the Rubber Industry Master Plan, or the National Employment Policy. (34-40)

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 insufficient funding.

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Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Anti-Trafficking Awareness Campaign†	Aims to raise public awareness on human trafficking through the use of radio and billboard messages. (7) In 2019, conducted an anti-trafficking public awareness campaign during the country's World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, as well as other times throughout the year. (9,25)
Shelters‡	MOGCSP-operated shelters for vulnerable street children in Lofa and Nimba County. (6,25) During the reporting period, the program provided shelter for approximately 20 children who were victims of abuse or sexual exploitation. Managers of these facilities reported that their operations were funded entirely through donations. (25)
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor II (CLEAR II)	USDOL-funded project implemented by Winrock International and partners Verité and Lawyers Without Borders to build the capacity of the government to address child labor. (2,41,42) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.
U.S. Government-Funded Projects on Education for Adolescent Girls	Projects that aim to improve access to education and improve child protection. Includes Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children; Increasing Support for Out-of-School Girls and Youth, implemented by USAID; and the McGovern-Dole International Food For Education and Child Nutrition Program, implemented by USDA. These projects were active in 2019. (25,43-45)
Liberia Social Safety Nets Project (2017–2021)	\$10 million World Bank-funded 4-year project implemented by MOGCSP that aims to establish key national safety net delivery systems and provide support for low-income households. (25,46) In 2019, collected data in four counties and disbursed the Social Cash Transfer program's first quarterly payment in October 2019, reaching 3,250 participant households in Maryland and Grand Kru Counties. (47)

† Program is funded by the Government of Liberia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (48-54)

Research was unable to determine if data from the 2017 labor force survey, which reportedly includes a child labor component, was analyzed in 2019. (6,9,27) Although the government funds social programs, they are not sufficient to address all sectors in which child labor occurs, including in domestic work, the production of rubber, and the mining of gold and diamonds. (25)

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 Liberia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.	2013 – 2019
	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2013 – 2019
	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those who are employed less than full-time and those who are working outside of school hours.	2016 – 2019
Enforcement	Ensure that penalties for employing children under the minimum age for work are stringent enough to deter violations.	2014 – 2019
	Publish information on the labor inspectorate's funding and the number of child labor violations found.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure labor inspections are conducted in all sectors in which children work.	2016 – 2019
	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties for child labor violations.	2017 – 2019
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate's complaint and referral mechanism is adequately supported and operational.	2017 – 2019
	Conduct an adequate number of worksite inspections to combat child labor.	2017 – 2019
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement related to the worst forms of child labor, including the number of investigations, violations found, penalties applied, and whether initial and refresher trainings were offered.	2017 – 2019
	Ensure adequate funding for child labor enforcement agencies, such as the Ministry of Labor, the Liberia National Police, and the Women and Children Protection Section, and provide necessary training for such officials to enforce child labor laws.	2010 – 2019
	Disaggregate the child endangerment cases prosecuted through the Ministry of Justice to determine the number of cases related to the worst forms of child labor.	2016 – 2019
Coordination	Ensure adequate funding for the National Commission on Child Labor's program activities to address child labor.	2017 – 2019
	Ensure coordinating bodies, including the TIP Task Force, are implementing effective case referral mechanisms.	2019

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into relevant policies.	2010 – 2019
	Publish information about the activities taken to implement policies that address child labor.	2017 – 2019
Social Programs	Collect and publish comprehensive research data to determine child labor activities and to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2019
	Improve access to education by subsidizing the cost of school related costs and reduce barriers to education by building additional schools, addressing sexual abuse in schools, and providing adequate transportation.	2012 – 2019
	Ensure children do not leave school before the completion of compulsory education.	2017 – 2019
	Expand existing social programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, especially in forced domestic work, the production of rubber, and the mining of gold and diamonds.	2009 – 2019

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