

In 2019, Sri Lanka made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government significantly increased the budget for the labor inspectorate and increased the number of labor inspectors. The Sri Lanka Police also took action to investigate four cases involving the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In addition, the government approved the National Child Protection Policy as a measure to reduce child sex tourism. However, children in Sri Lanka engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Sri Lanka's hazardous work list is not comprehensive because it does not include domestic work. In addition, the labor inspectorate is not authorized to assess penalties for labor law violations.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Sri Lanka engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1,2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Sri Lanka.

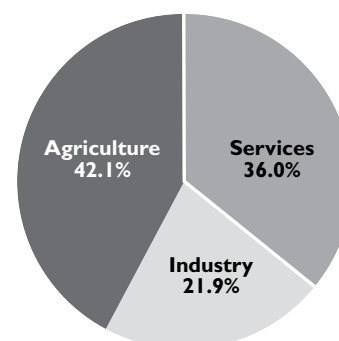
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	0.8 (28,515)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	98.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	0.9
Primary Completion Rate (%)		102.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Child Activity Survey (CAS), 2016. (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	Farming, including raising livestock (5-8)
	Fishing, including deep sea fishing,† processing fish, and selling fish (2,6-10)
Industry	Manufacturing, including textiles and garments, and food processing (6,8,11)
	Mining† and construction† (2,6,8,11,12)
Services	Domestic work (2,5,6,8)
	Vending, in stores and on the streets, transportation, and begging (2,5,6,8,9)
	Work in hotels, restaurants, and offices (6,12)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,5,13-17)
	Forced labor in domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,5)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking (5,11,18,19)

† 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.

The 2016 Child Activity Survey's definition of child labor does not align with international standards because children ages 5–11 working less than 15 hours per week and children ages 12–14 working less than 25 hours per

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week in agriculture are not counted as child laborers. These issues may have led to an underestimation of the population of children in child labor in the Child Activity Survey. (6) The ILO and an NGO documented several cases of debt distress among workers at private, smallholding tea estates, which increased the risk of child labor in the tea sector. (2) Debt distress can be linked to debts that workers owed to the estate for housing and accommodating their families. (20,21) There are reports of children subjected to child trafficking internally, including from tea estates, to perform domestic work in Colombo. In addition, child domestic workers are subjected to sexual, physical, and psychological abuse, non-payment of wages, and restrictions on movement. (1,5) Children, predominantly boys, are also forced into commercial sexual exploitation in tourist areas as part of the sex tourism industry, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1-3,17) In 2018, the ILO conducted a rapid assessment of the extent of commercial sexual exploitation of children in the coastal areas and found that most of the children were ages 15–17. According to the Sri Lankan Department of Labor, children living in coastal and agricultural areas, mining areas, and firewood-producing areas were vulnerable to child labor. (2)

Although the government provides free, compulsory education to all schoolchildren, some children in rural areas face barriers to accessing education, including difficulties in traveling to school in some regions and an inadequate number of teachers. (2,5)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Sri Lanka has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

In 2019, Sri Lanka ratified the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention (C. 29), which requires governments to adopt new measures to prevent all forms of forced labor. (17,22)

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Sri Lanka’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including protections for children engaged in domestic work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Sections 7, 9, 13, and 34 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act (23)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 20A of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act (23)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Hazardous Occupations Regulation No. 47 (23,24)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 358A, 360C, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code (25)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 360C, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code (25)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 286A, 360B, 360A(2), and 360A(4) of the Penal Code (25)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Sections 288, 288A, 288B, and 360C of the Penal Code (25)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Sections 20A and 31 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act; Section 2(xviii) of the Hazardous Occupations Regulation No. 47 (23,24)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		358(1)(d) of the Penal Code; Sections 20A and 31 of the Employment of Women, Young Persons, and Children Act; Section 2(xviii) of the Hazardous Occupations Regulation No. 47 (23-25)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Section 43 of the Education Ordinance; Compulsory Attendance of Children at Schools Regulation No. 1 of 2015 (26,27)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 47 of the Education Ordinance (26)

* No conscription (28)

The minimum working age is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (2, 17, 23, 26, 27) The hazardous work list is not comprehensive because it does not include domestic work, in which there is evidence that children are subject to abuse. (1)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the Department of Labor that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Labor in the Ministry of Skill Development, Employment and Labor Relations	Formerly the Ministry of Labor, Trade Union Relations, and Social Empowerment. Enforces labor law in relation to the employment of children and young persons. (2) Receives public complaints of child labor lodged in national and district-level offices. Receives complaints from other state organizations, including from the National Child Protection Authority. (2) Conducts special investigations in relation to child labor and hazardous labor, and takes legal action as necessary. (2)
Children and Women's Bureau of the Sri Lankan Police	Enforces laws on child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the use of children in illicit activities. (5, 29) Also supervises the NCPA Special Police Investigation Unit, which has approximately 40 police officers who investigate complaints involving children, including complaints of child labor. (2, 5, 10)
National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) Special Police Investigation Unit	Investigates complaints involving children, including unlawful child labor. (5, 30) Along with the Children and Women's Bureau of the Sri Lankan Police, receives complaints on commercial sexual exploitation and the use of children in illicit activities. (2) Has approximately 300 child protection officers based in the districts who are tasked with preventing child exploitation and protecting victims. (2, 5, 29)
Department of Probation and Child Care Services	Coordinates services for child victims of forced labor, human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation who have been referred by the police and the court. (5)

Several ministries, departments, and agencies have legal authority for the enforcement of criminal laws against child labor. The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA), the Criminal Investigations Department of the Sri Lankan Police, and the Attorney General's Department are responsible for the enforcement of criminal laws against child trafficking and forced child labor. (2)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the Department of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the labor inspectorate's lack of authority to assess penalties.

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,154,000 (5)	\$2,110,932.64 (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	509 (5)	679 (2)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (5)	No (2)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (5)	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (5)	N/A (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	91,000 (5)	64,851 (2)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (5)	64,851 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	2 (5)	10 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (5)	8 (2)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (31)	8 (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (2)

In 2019, the government substantially increased funding for the labor inspectorate, including allocating district offices with at least one vehicle with fuel for inspection purposes. The government employed 679 officers who can engage in child labor inspections. (2) Labor inspectors attached to the Women’s and Children’s Division of the Department of Labor are dedicated to inspecting child labor. The number of labor inspectors is sufficient for the size of Sri Lanka’s workforce, according to ILO’s technical advice and the Sri Lanka Department of Labor. (2) However, reports indicate that the labor inspectorate did not have sufficient staffing to carry out inspections, especially inspections of factories in the northern and eastern provinces. During the reporting period, the Department of Labor received 145 child labor complaints from the NCPA child helpline, of which 119 were investigated. (2)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Sri Lanka took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including the lack of information regarding violations found.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (5)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (5)	N/A (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (31)	7 (2)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (5)	Unknown (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (31)	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (5)	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (5)	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (2)

The government did not provide information on number of violations, prosecutions initiated, convictions, or penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor for inclusion in this report.

NGOs report that investigators did not have adequate facilities or human resources to carry out investigations. Investigators lacked transportation facilities, and the Sri Lankan Police lack facilities to record evidence. (2,5,31)

Although the government publishes some crime statistics, the Sri Lankan Police do not report cases investigated specific to forced child labor, child trafficking, child commercial sexual exploitation, child soldiering, and the use of children in illicit activities. (2,32)

In 2019, four new sex trafficking cases involving the commercial sexual exploitation of children were reported. The Crimes Division of the Sri Lanka Police is investigating the cases. (16) The Department of Labor has also referred eight cases for prosecution stemming from investigations. Seven cases involving child labor crimes were concluded in the courts. (2) Although isolated reports alleged that government officials were complicit in child trafficking at a state-run orphanage, the government did not initiate investigations into these cases during the reporting period. Research also indicates some victims of child trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation may be penalized for prostitution and other offenses rather than treated as victims. (33)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

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

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Coordinates efforts to eliminate child labor, including the implementation of the National Policy on Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka. Chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Skills Development, Employer and Labor Relations, includes representatives from key government agencies, employer and workers' organizations, ILO, UNICEF, and NGOs. (2,5,34) During the reporting period, National Steering Committee working groups met regularly and took actions to implement strategies to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The National Steering Committee met once and approved a national-level awareness program, which includes a poster campaign to schools and a media awareness-raising campaign for the World Day Against Child Labor. (2)
NCPA	Coordinates and monitors activities related to the protection of children, including activities to combat child labor. Consults with relevant government ministries, local governments, employers, and NGOs, and recommends policies and actions to prevent and protect children from abuse and exploitation. (34)
National Anti-Trafficking Task Force	Coordinates inter-agency efforts to address all human trafficking issues, including commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Led by the Ministry of Justice and includes representatives from a range of government agencies, including the Ministry of Social Services, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, Department of Labor, NCPA, Department of Probation and Child Care, Police Criminal Division, and Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse to Women and Children. (35,36) Met monthly during the reporting period to share information and best practices. (16)
Child Development Committees	Coordinate activities and exchange information among child protection officers, police, and labor, education, and health officials at the village, division, and district levels. Function in 25 districts and 313 divisions. (5)

During the reporting period, the ILO completed a study on coordination mechanisms among ministries and departments. The study's findings show greater cooperation at village and divisional levels and includes recommendations to further strengthen coordination among all agencies. (2)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

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

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Policy on Elimination of Child Labor in Sri Lanka	Aims to mainstream child labor issues into national development policies, increase the minimum age for employment, promote the implementation of hazardous work regulations, strengthen capacity to enforce child labor laws, and maintain a complaint procedure. (35) This policy was active during the reporting period. (2)
National Child Protection Policy†	Established by NCPA as a measure to reduce child sex tourism in Sri Lanka. (2)
National Strategic Plan to Monitor and Combat Human Trafficking (2015–2019)	Sought to combat human trafficking by raising stakeholder awareness, improving victim protection services, increasing the prosecution of human trafficking cases, and conducting research and data collection. Also sought to improve coordination among the Anti-Trafficking Task Force members. (36) This policy was active during the reporting period. (33)

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Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Policy	Description
Decent Work Country Program (2018–2022)	Details the priorities and outcomes required to make progress toward the goal of decent work for all. Identifies key areas of work for the eradication of child labor by 2022, including operationalizing the child labor free zone model in all districts, expanding the inspection system to cover child labor in the informal sector, raising the minimum age for employment to 16 years, revising regulations on hazardous child labor, improving the complaints and referral mechanisms, and regularly collecting data on child labor. (37) This policy was active during the reporting period. (2)

† The policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (5,38-40)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Skill Development, Employment and Labor Relations and the Department of Labor began implementing the draft Action Plan for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labor by 2022, by assigning activities and responsibilities to the appropriate ministries. (2)

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, which cover the main sectors in which child labor has been identified in the country (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Child Labor Free Zone Model†	Local government initiatives that seek to eliminate child labor through the identification of children engaged in child labor, a rehabilitation program, assistance to families of children at risk of engaging in child labor, and an awareness-raising campaign. Operated by the district secretariats, with assistance from the Department of Labor, and with technical and financial support from the ILO. (2,11) During the reporting period, developed Child Labor Free Zone Model Guidelines. (2)
Let's Protect Children†	Presidential Secretariat program that seeks to monitor child protection policies implemented by the Ministries of Education, Health, and Labor. Aims to ensure child safety and physical and psychosocial development. (10) This program was active during the reporting period. (2)
School Child Protection Committees	Preventive program established by NCPA to empower children to protect themselves from trafficking and child labor. During the reporting period, NCPA established and strengthened the committees in 510 schools across Sri Lanka. (2) In 2019, the program also distributed education equipment for 2,129 needy students across the island to discourage dropping out of school. (2)
'1929' Childline Sri Lanka†	NCPA-funded and operated 24-hour toll-free emergency telephone service for vulnerable and abused children. Connects children in need of help to direct assistance and rehabilitation services. (41) This program was active during the reporting period and referred child labor cases to the Department of Labor. (2)
Shelter for Victims of Human Trafficking	Ministry of Women and Child Affairs shelter that provides children and female victims of human trafficking with safe shelter and access to medical, psychological, and legal assistance. (35,38) The shelter was operational during the reporting period. (5)

† Program is funded by the Government of Sri Lanka.

‡ The government had other programs that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (2)

Through the USDOL-funded Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor program, which concluded in 2019, the government strengthened District and Divisional Child Development Committees in all 25 districts and 313 divisional areas. Labor inspectors were formally included in the District and Divisional Child Development Committees. (2)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Sri Lanka (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2019
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited to children are comprehensive, including domestic work.	2017 – 2019
Enforcement	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties for labor law violations.	2015 – 2019
	Collect and publish information on labor law enforcement actions, including initial training for new labor inspectors, and on criminal law enforcement actions, including the number of violations, prosecutions, convictions, and on penalties related to the worst forms of child labor.	2014 – 2019
	Provide investigators with additional funding and adequate facilities, including transportation and facilities to record evidence, and human resources to adequately investigate forced labor, child trafficking, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2011 – 2019
	Provide adequate staffing in the northern and eastern provinces for the labor inspectorate to carry out inspections.	2019
	Ensure sufficient efforts are made to investigate isolated reports of officials allegedly complicit in the worst forms of child labor.	2019
	Ensure that victims of child trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation are not punished for their involvement in child labor.	2019
Social Programs	Ensure that the definition of child labor used in national child labor surveys to calculate child labor statistics clearly aligns with international standards.	2017 – 2019
	Eliminate barriers to education, including difficulties with transportation to schools and an inadequate number of teachers.	2012 – 2019
	Institute programs to address the risks of child labor in tea estates and in coastal, agricultural, mining, and firewood-producing areas.	2019

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