

In 2019, Zimbabwe made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved an updated Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action for 2019–2021, and with support from UNICEF, published new data on the prevalence of child labor in Zimbabwe. In addition, the government initiated prosecutions related to trafficking of children. However, children engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, mining, and tobacco production, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture, including in the harvesting of sugar cane. Law enforcement agencies lack resources to enforce child labor laws. In addition, gaps remain in the country’s legal framework against child labor, including the lack of free basic education, which increases children’s vulnerability to child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Zimbabwe engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, mining, and tobacco production, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture, including in the harvesting of sugar cane. (1-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Zimbabwe. 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	40.4 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	90.7
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	42.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		98.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2013, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018. (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 the production of tea, cotton, tobacco, corn, and sugarcane (1,8-12)
	Fishing, including casting nets, hauling fish loads, and sorting fish (10,13,14)
	Work in forestry, such as dragging logs from felling sites and loading logs for transport (14,15)
	Cattle herding (11,12)
Industry	Mining and panning of gold and chrome, using dangerous chemicals such as cyanide and mercury, and extracting material from underground passages and quarries† (11,16-18)
Services	Street work, including vending and begging (10,16,19-22)
	Domestic work (5,10,15,16,23)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (23)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2-4,11,23,24)
	Forced labor in agriculture, mining for the production of gold and chrome, and domestic work, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,23)

† 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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Deteriorating economic conditions, cholera outbreaks, drought, and food shortages likely make children more vulnerable to child labor. (11,25-28) Zimbabwean children living in border towns are trafficked to South Africa, Mozambique, and Zambia, where they become victims of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in domestic work. (5) Some families recruit rural children, especially orphans, to work in cities, often with promises of education or adoption. Such children are subject to domestic service or forced to work in mining, drug smuggling, or other illegal activities. (5,29) Girls under the age of 18 are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, particularly along major transit corridors, due to a combination of factors, including poverty, the breakdown of the family unit, gender-based violence, and sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (3,5,11,23,30)

Children ages 12 to 17 work on tobacco farms, performing activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and grading tobacco, tasks which often expose them to toxic chemicals and effects of nicotine from handling tobacco leaves. (9,31) Children also work on sugar plantations in the southeastern part of the country, using dangerous tools and working in hot conditions. (12,32) In 2019, the government, with support from the UNICEF Child Protection Fund, completed and published a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, which included data on the percentage and geographic distribution of child labor in Zimbabwe. (33,34) The government also completed an updated labor force and child labor survey in 2019, but results have not been published. (11)

Beginning in grade seven, children are required to show birth registration to sit for exams; however, many children, especially those in rural areas, are not registered at birth due to a lack of awareness of birth registration requirements and poverty. As a result, children may drop out of school, making them more vulnerable to child labor. (10,11,35-37) In addition, prohibitively expensive school fees may limit access to education, and children with disabilities may experience greater abuse, violence, stigma, and exclusion. (11,35,38)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Zimbabwe 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 Zimbabwe's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including access to free public education.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Section 9 of the Labor Relations Amendment Act; Section 10A(1) of the Children's Act (39,40, 41)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 9 of the Labor Relations Amendment Act and Section 10A(4) the Children's Act (39,41)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 3(1) of Labour Relations (Employment of Children and Young Persons) Regulations and Section 2 and 10A(4) of the Children's Act (41,42)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 54–55 of the Constitution; Section 6 of the Labor Relations Amendment Act (39,43)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Section 3 of the Trafficking in Persons Act (44)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 61, 83, 86 and 87 of the Criminal Law Act; Section 8(2)a of the Children's Act; Section 3 of the Trafficking in Persons Act (41,44,45)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 156 of the Criminal Law Act; Section 10 of the Children's Act (41,45)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	16	Sections 5, 9, and 10 of the National Service Act (46)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Section 9 of the National Service Act (46)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	12‡	Section 5 of the Education Act (47)
Free Public Education	No		

‡ Age calculated based on available information (48)

The Cabinet approved an amendment to the Education Act in February 2019, which would establish state-funded education up to grade seven. The bill is under debate within Parliament (11,49,50) Currently, Zimbabwean law does not mandate free basic education for children. (11,51,52) This standard makes children ages 12 to 15 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school and are not legally permitted to work. (48) In addition, laws do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as they do not criminally prohibit the use of children in the production of pornography or for pornographic performances. (45,53,54)

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 Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare (MPSLSW) that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Social Welfare (MPSLSW)	Enforces labor and anti-human trafficking laws and investigates labor-related complaints, including complaints involving child labor. (11) Also conducts industry and sectoral-based labor inspections through appointed agents of national employment councils, which consist of representation from both employers' associations and trade unions. (55,56) Provides child protection services, including investigating, intervening in, and reporting on child abuse cases through its Department for Child Welfare. (29)
Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)	Enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor in conjunction with the MPSLSW and the Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs. (11) Address issues related to child labor and human trafficking through victim-friendly units in every district. Conduct transnational human trafficking investigations through an anti-trafficking desk at Zimbabwe's INTERPOL office. (29)
Ministry of Justice, Legal and Parliamentary Affairs	Oversees all courts, including labor courts. Addresses human trafficking and child victim cases through victim-friendly courts. (11)

Labor Law Enforcement

Research did not find information on whether labor law enforcement agencies in Zimbabwe took actions to combat child labor.

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (14)	No (11)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (57)	N/A (11)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (14)	Unknown (11)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (14)	Yes (11)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (14)	Unknown (11)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (14)	Yes (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (14)	Yes (11)

The government did not provide information on its labor law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report. (11) Local sources estimate that the labor inspectorate staffs 100-120 inspectors, which is likely insufficient for the size of Zimbabwe's workforce, which includes approximately 7.9 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Zimbabwe would employ about 527 labor inspectors. (11,58) The limited number of staff may hinder the inspectorate's ability to adequately monitor the agricultural sector, a sector in which children are engaged in child labor, particularly during peak harvest seasons. Furthermore, labor inspectors also oversee arbitration and conciliation, which strains their ability to conduct onsite investigations to combat child labor. (55) Research indicates that the government also lacks sufficient resources, mainly financial, to investigate child labor law violations. (11,59)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Zimbabwe took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MPSLSW that may hinder adequate criminal and labor law enforcement, including the publication of enforcement data.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown(29)	Unknown (11)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (29)	N/A (11)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown(29)	Yes (11)
Number of Investigations	0 (29)	1 (23)
Number of Violations Found	0 (29)	1 (23)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	2 (29)	4 (23)
Number of Convictions	2 (29)	Unknown (11)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (29)	Unknown (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (14)	Yes (11)

The government did not provide information related to its training of new criminal law enforcement investigators, or the number of convictions related to child labor and whether penalties were imposed. (11) In 2019, law enforcement officials arrested four people in a trafficking case that included child victims. The individuals are currently awaiting trial. (23) The government, in collaboration with the IOM, launched a

new referral system to strengthen protections for vulnerable migrants, which included standard operating procedures to guide officials in identifying, referring, and assisting victims of human trafficking. (23,60) In addition, 264 investigators participated in training on trafficking-in-persons-related legislation, prosecution, and victim protection measures. (23)

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 the efficacy of coordination activities.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee to Address the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Addresses the worst forms of child labor. Chaired by the MPSSLW and includes the Ministries of Health and Child Care; Primary and Secondary Education; and Youth Development, Indigenization, and Empowerment. (61) Also includes international organizations and civil society groups, such as workers' and employers' organizations. (61) The National Steering Committee to Address the Worst Forms of Child Labor did not meet in 2019. (11)
Ministry-Level Committee on Children's Issues	Coordinates government ministries' efforts related to children's issues, including child labor. Includes the MPSSLW and the Ministries of Education; Women's Affairs; and Youth Development, Indigenization, and Empowerment. (11,19,61) Includes Child Protection Committees, which operate at the village, ward, district, provincial, and national levels, to discuss issues affecting children, including child labor. (62) Research could not determine whether the Ministry-Level Committee on Children's Issues met in 2019. (11)
Anti-Trafficking Inter-Ministerial Committee (ATIMC)	Coordinates actions to combat human trafficking, including the implementation of the Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action (NAPLAC). (16,23) In 2019, the ATIMC worked with the IOM to conduct capacity building trainings on provision of direct services to human trafficking victims. (23)
National Task Force on Street Children	Outlines strategies to combat child labor, including feeding street children at drop-in centers, reuniting children with their families, and offering counseling sessions. Chaired by the MPSSLW and includes NGOs that work on street children's issues. (61) Also includes the Ministry of Home Affairs, represented by the ZRP. (62) Research could not determine whether the National Task Force on Street Children had met in 2019. (11)
Child Protection Committees	Operate at the village, ward, district, provincial levels to discuss issues affecting children, including child labor. (11) Representatives include ministries, civil society, local volunteers, and teachers. Report to the ministry-level Committee on Children's Issues. (62) Child Protection Committees were active in 2019, but individual committees' performance was not uniform throughout the country; NGOs filled gaps in services, particularly in rural areas. (11)

Government information on the efforts by coordinating bodies to address child labor is limited. In addition, a lack of resources hindered coordinating bodies, including the National Task Force on Street Children and Child Protection Committees, from carrying out their mandates. (11,63)

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 of key policies.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor	Strengthens understanding of child labor issues and creates an entity to coordinate responses to the findings. Consists of three focus areas: education assistance, poverty assistance through a cash transfer scheme, and health assistance. Research indicates the government took no actions during the reporting period to implement this policy. (11)
Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action (NAPLAC) (2019–2021)†	Replaces 2016–2018 NAPLAC. Aims to implement the Palermo Protocol through the development of strategies to combat human trafficking, with emphasis on prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership. (23,64)
Zimbabwe UN Development Assistance Framework (2016–2020)	Integrates child labor prevention strategies in the Education for All campaign headed by the UN. Promotes gender equality and reduction of HIV/AIDS prevalence, and allocates social resources to address child labor. (65) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period. (11)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (27)

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Although the government approved a new Trafficking in Persons National Plan of Action in 2019, it has yet to launch the policy. (23,64)

The National Social Protection Framework (NSPF) aims to provide strategies that address poverty and labor market interventions, among others, although the policy does not include child labor prevention and elimination measures. Furthermore, there is no indication that the government made efforts to operationalize the NSPF in 2019. (11,27)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating or 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.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT)† (2012–2019)	Government-funded unconditional cash transfer program to assist labor-constrained and food-insecure households to avert risk-coping strategies, such as child labor. (11,66) In 2018, the government allocated \$11 million to the HSCT program. (27) The program was set to expire mid-2019, but continued to provide services throughout the entire year. (11)
Basic Education Assistance Module†	Government program, with support by the UK Department of International Development (DFID), that provides basic financial assistance to families for education costs, such as tuition and examination fees. Aims to keep children in school and to enroll children who lack access to school because of economic hardship. (11) In 2019, the program dispersed \$8 million and provided school fees assistance to 415,000 orphans and other vulnerable children. For 2020, the government allocated \$26 million for the program, an increase from previous years, however, severe inflation significantly offset these increases, resulting in a total budget of approximately \$9 million for the program. (11,27,67)
Mobile Birth Registration Program†	Government mobile birth registration program, implemented by the Registrar General's office and some local governments, to ensure that citizens receive identity documents, including birth certificates. (36,68) Every district in the country has mobile teams to support this program. (29) The government continued to implement the Mobile Birth Registration Program during the reporting period. (36)
National Action Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (2016–2020)	UNICEF Child Protection Fund (CPF) program, supported by DFID, that focuses on equity and access to quality education for children and provides child protection services. Provides cash assistance for families to keep children in school. (27,69,70) In 2019, CPF conducted and published the results of a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on child protection. (11)
Donor-Funded Programs	International donor-funded programs that aim to increase protections for vulnerable children. Includes DREAMS, a PEPFAR/USAID project that aims to reduce rates of HIV among adolescent girls and young women, including girls vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation; the Zimbabwe Accountability and Artisanal Mining Program, a German state-owned, DFID bank-funded project that improves occupational safety and health standards in artisanal and small-scale gold mining and raises awareness of child labor among informal gold miners; and the Zimbabwe Education Development Fund Phase II (2012–2019), a DFID bank-funded initiative implemented by UNICEF that promotes equitable and quality education. (71-73)

† Program is funded by the Government of Zimbabwe.

Although Zimbabwe has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, especially child labor in agriculture, mining, and commercial sexual exploitation.

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 Zimbabwe (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2019
	Establish free basic education for children through age 16.	2009 – 2019
	Ensure that the age up to which education is compulsory is the same as the minimum age for work.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use, procuring, and offering of a child for the production of pornography and pornographic performances.	2019
Enforcement	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties for labor law violations.	2017 – 2019
	Publish information about the government's labor law enforcement efforts.	2016 – 2019
	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate has sufficient financial and human resources to address labor violations and enforce minimum age protections in all sectors, including agriculture.	2017 – 2019
	Publish information on the government's criminal law enforcement efforts, including trainings for new investigators, convictions, and whether penalties were assessed for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor.	2015 – 2019
Coordination	Ensure that child labor coordinating committees are active and receive sufficient resources to carry out their intended mandates.	2016 – 2019
Government Policies	Integrate child labor prevention and elimination measures in relevant policies, such as the National Social Protection Framework.	2017 – 2019
	Implement national policies, including National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor, the UN Development Assistance Framework, and the National Social Protection Framework.	2010 – 2019
Social Programs	Ensure that children are registered at birth to facilitate their entrance into secondary school.	2014 – 2019
	Enhance efforts to make education accessible for all children by eliminating or defraying school fees and ensuring children with disabilities have equal access to education.	2016 – 2019
	Expand existing social programs to address child labor, especially child labor in agriculture, commercial sexual exploitation, and mining.	2010 – 2019

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