

In 2019, Suriname made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor and drafted, approved, and implemented the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons. The Ministry of Labor also adopted a referral network system developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs in collaboration with UNICEF, which aims to address violations of children’s rights by not only removing children from exploitative situations, but by seeking solutions to the causes of their exploitation. In addition, the Trafficking in Persons Working Group launched an extensive awareness-raising campaign, including billboards, radio and television messaging, and the distribution of flyers at entry points throughout the country. However, children in Suriname engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. Prohibitions related to the use of children for illicit activities do not meet international standards. In addition, the compulsory education age does not reach the minimum age for employment, leaving some children vulnerable to labor exploitation.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Suriname engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. (1-4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Suriname. 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 | 7.2 (Unavailable) |
| Attending School (%) | 5 to 14 | 95.3 |
| Combining Work and School (%) | 7 to 14 | 7.3 |
| Primary Completion Rate (%) | | 85.1 |

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018. (6)

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 | Harvesting crops, applying pesticides,† carrying heavy loads† (4) Fishing, hunting and forestry (7,8) |
| Industry | Mining, particularly gold mining (1,4,7,9,10) Construction,† including carrying heavy loads† (4,8) Wood processing, including carrying heavy loads†(4) |
| Services | Street work, including vending (4,8) Domestic work (7,8) |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡ | Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-4,7,11) |

† 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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Throughout the coastal areas of Suriname, children work in agriculture, whereas in the capital of Paramaribo they primarily engage in street vending. Additionally, children, mostly boys, work at carrying heavy loads in small-scale gold mines in the Southeast region of the country, where they risk exposure to mercury and cyanide, excessive noise, extreme heat, and collapsing sand walls. (1,4,9,12,13) Children have also been reported working in small-scale construction and wood processing companies outside of Paramaribo. (4) Moreover, children, including children from Guyana, are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, including in informal mining camps in Suriname’s remote interior. (2,7,12,13)

Although Suriname’s net attendance percentage for primary school is 95 percent, it is only 53 percent for secondary school, and research indicates that secondary school attendance in the interior is as low as 21 percent. Children from low-income households, particularly in the interior, face difficulties accessing education due to long distances to schools, transportation costs, and school fees. (1,4,14,15)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Suriname 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 Suriname’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the compulsory education age, which is below the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

| Standard | Meets International Standards | Age | Legislation |
|---|-------------------------------|-----|---|
| Minimum Age for Work | Yes | 16 | Articles 1 (j–l), 3, and 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act; Article 17 of the Labor Code (16,17) |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work | Yes | 18 | Articles 1 (k–l) and 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act; Article 1 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth (17,18) |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children | Yes | | Articles 2–3 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth; Article 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act (17,18) |
| Prohibition of Forced Labor | Yes | | Article 15 of the Constitution; Article 334 of the Penal Code (19,20) |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking | Yes | | Articles 307 and 334 of the Penal Code (20) |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children | Yes | | Articles 293, 303, and 306 of the Penal Code (20) |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities | No | | |
| Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment | Yes | 18 | Article 9 of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act (21) |
| Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military | N/A* | | |

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

| Standard | Meets International Standards | Age | Legislation |
|---|-------------------------------|-----|--|
| Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups | No | | |
| Compulsory Education Age | No | 12 | Article 39 of the Constitution; Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education (19,22) |
| Free Public Education | Yes | | Articles 38–39 of the Constitution (19) |

* No conscription (23)

Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education requires children to attend school until they are at least age 12. (22) This leaves children between ages 12 and 16 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are no longer required to attend school but are not yet legally permitted to work.

The Constitution guarantees free public education for all citizens, and the September 2014 amendment to the Citizenship and Residency Law granted citizenship to children born in Suriname of foreign-born parents. Sources indicate, however, that a small number of children born in Suriname to foreign parents before September 2014 remain ineligible to receive citizenship and free public education. (1,19,24)

The Penal Code establishes penalties for the production and trafficking of drugs, but it does not appear to specifically prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child in the production and trafficking of drugs. (20)

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 laws related to child labor. (13) Reports suspected forced labor cases within 45 minutes of identification, including the worst forms of child labor, to the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force. (4) |
| Suriname Police Force | Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. (13) Includes the Youth Affairs Police, who cover law enforcement involving children under age 18 and are jointly responsible for child labor-related crimes. Also includes the Police Trafficking in Persons Unit, which investigates reports and allegations of human trafficking and forced sexual exploitation nationwide, including cases involving children. (4,11) |
| Prosecutor's Office | Investigates and prosecutes human trafficking cases, and enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (4) |

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Suriname took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including targeted inspections in risk-prone sectors.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

| Overview of Labor Law Enforcement | 2018 | 2019 |
|---|----------|---------|
| Labor Inspectorate Funding | Unknown | Unknown |
| Number of Labor Inspectors | 50 (25) | 50 (4) |
| Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor | Yes (12) | N/A (4) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (12) | No (4) |

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

| Overview of Labor Law Enforcement | 2018 | 2019 |
|--|----------|---------|
| Number of Labor Inspections Conducted | Unknown | 834 (4) |
| Number Conducted at Worksite | Unknown | 0 (4) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations Found | 0 (26) | 3 (4) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed | N/A (12) | 2 (4) |
| Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected | N/A (26) | 0 (4) |
| Routine Inspections Conducted | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Routine Inspections Targeted | Unknown | Yes (4) |
| Unannounced Inspections Permitted | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Unannounced Inspections Conducted | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Complaint Mechanism Exists | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services | No (12) | Yes (4) |

In 2019, the labor inspectorate reported three child labor violations during two separate inspections. Two minors, ages 13 and 15, were found to be working in hazardous conditions in a wood processing company; a third person, whose age was not determined due to lack of identification papers, was reported during another inspection. (4) In the former case, two fines were issued in the amount of \$6,645 per child. The company was given until February 2020 to pay the fine or risk court proceedings. (4) In addition, 17 children were identified engaging in street vending and referred to the Ministry of Social Affairs for assistance. (4)

Labor inspections are mainly conducted near coastal areas. The Ministry of Labor noted that there is an insufficient number of labor inspectors to ensure the enforcement of labor laws in the informal sector, particularly in mining and agricultural areas, fisheries, and the country's interior. (1,13,23,27) All labor inspectors are trained and authorized to enforce child labor laws. (12)

Although the Ministry of Labor does not provide disaggregated funding information, the labor inspectorate did report that its funding is insufficient to adequately cover all sectors in the country, including the formal and informal sectors. In addition, high-risk sectors are not specifically targeted because labor inspectors mainly conduct routine inspections in the formal sectors, which have lower incidences of child labor. (12)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Suriname 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 allocation of financial and human 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 (12) | Yes (4) |
| Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor | N/A (12) | N/A (4) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |
| Number of Investigations | Unknown | 2 (25) |
| Number of Violations Found | 1 (28) | Unknown |
| Number of Prosecutions Initiated | 0 (28) | 0 |
| Number of Convictions | 7 (29) | Unknown |
| Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor | Unknown | Unknown |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services | Yes (12) | Yes (4) |

In 2019, the Ministry of Social Affairs, in collaboration with UNICEF, developed a referral mechanism that aims to address violations of children's rights by not only working toward the removal of children from exploitative situations, but also by seeking solutions to the root causes of their exploitation. (4)

The government did not provide complete data on criminal law enforcement efforts. The number of investigators is insufficient to respond to human trafficking cases, and, according to the Prosecutor's Office, investigations are initiated only as a result of complaints filed and are limited by a lack of resources, especially for travel to the interior of the country. (13,27,30-32) When the Youth Affairs Police find children working on the street, these children are sometimes registered and sent home without referrals to any relevant services. (13,32)

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 Commission on Combating Child Labor | Serves as the leading body in drafting child labor policies. (12) Coordinates and monitors efforts to combat child labor, including the execution of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. Also coordinates with the Integrated Child Protection Network to maximize awareness-raising efforts. (4) In 2019, completed the drafting and approval of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor and attended a workshop that focused on legislation, awareness raising, planning and activity coordination, and referral systems. (4,25) |
| Trafficking in Persons Working Group | Coordinates the government's anti-human trafficking efforts. Provides care to victims of human trafficking through government-supported NGOs. (27) Comprises nine government agencies, including organizations that target the worst forms of child labor. (13) In 2019, launched an extensive awareness-raising campaign, including billboards, radio and television messaging, and the distribution of flyers at entry points throughout the country. (4,11) |
| Integrated Child Protection Network | Prevents child abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including child labor. (13) Is led by the Ministry of Social Affairs and includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Police, Office of the First Lady, National Assembly, and NGO stakeholders, with support from UNICEF. (13) In 2019, along with the Trafficking in Persons Working Group and National Commission on Combating Child Labor, participated in a workshop that focused on legislation, awareness raising, planning and activity coordination, and referral systems. Through its Technical Commission, which was established in 2018, helped draft the referral system in collaboration with UNICEF. (4,25) |

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 Action Plan to Combat Child Labor 2019† | Aims to combat child labor by removing children from child labor and by addressing issues that led children to become involved in child labor, including poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Also addresses the social and education reintegration of these children. (4) Was approved by the Council of Ministers in April 2019. (4) |
| National Action Plan for the Prevention and Response to Trafficking in Persons (2019)† | Aims to combat and prevent human trafficking, including through the prevention, protection, and reintegration of victims, and the prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking in persons. (33) In 2019, the Ministry of Justice and Police conducted an extensive awareness-raising campaign, trained government stakeholders on the identification of human trafficking, and increased its surveillance activities. (4) |

† 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 child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including services for child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

| Program | Description |
|---------------------------|--|
| Child and Youth Hotline† | Government-run hotline that provides confidential advice to children in need, including victims of the worst forms of child labor. (31) Receives approximately 80 calls per day. (30) In 2019, continued to provide support to children, referred victims of child labor to Social Affairs, and expanded this support to include school visits. (4,25) |
| Anti-Trafficking Hotline† | Government-sponsored hotline through which citizens can provide information to the police about human trafficking cases. (31) In 2019, was taken over by the Command Center of the Directorate of National Security to improve response capacity. (4) |

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Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)

| Program | Description |
|--|--|
| Second Basic Education Improvement Program (2015–2040) | \$20 million IDB-funded, 25-year loan implemented by the Ministry of Education to develop curriculums and textbooks, provide teacher training, renovate classrooms, build housing for teachers in the interior, and build a center for teacher training and professional development. Aims to benefit 90,000 students and 6,500 teachers. (36,37) In 2019, trained teachers and school leaders on newly developed curriculums. (4) |

† Program is funded by the Government of Suriname.

The government continues to support initiatives to eradicate child labor, but existing social programs are inadequate to fully address the problem. In particular, Suriname lacks programs, including shelters, to assist child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, and children who work in mining and agriculture. (13,14,38)

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 Suriname (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 use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs. | 2015 – 2019 |
| | Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups. | 2016 – 2019 |
| | Increase the compulsory education age to at least age 16, the minimum age for work. | 2009 – 2019 |
| | Ensure that all children, including children of foreign-born parents, have access to free public education. | 2015 – 2019 |
| Enforcement | Publish information on labor inspectorate funding. | 2012 – 2019 |
| | Ensure inspectors receive periodic refresher training. | 2019 |
| | Increase the number of labor inspectors to ensure the enforcement of labor laws, particularly in the mining and agricultural areas, fisheries, and the country's interior. | 2019 |
| | Ensure that the labor inspectorate is sufficiently funded to cover labor inspections in both the formal and informal sectors of the labor force. | 2018 – 2019 |
| | Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on the analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents, such as in fisheries and the interior of the country, particularly in mining and agricultural areas in which child labor is likely to occur. | 2015 – 2019 |
| | Publish information on criminal investigations, including the number of violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions obtained, and penalties imposed. | 2019 |
| | Increase the number of investigators responding to human trafficking cases, and allocate sufficient funding to ensure that criminal law enforcement officers have the resources necessary to conduct investigations, particularly in the interior of the country and informal mining areas. | 2014 – 2019 |
| | | |
| Social Programs | Develop social programs to prevent and eradicate child labor in agriculture and mining and to improve secondary school attendance, particularly in the interior. | 2015 – 2019 |
| | Strengthen social services and shelters to assist child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. | 2014 – 2019 |

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