

In 2020, Belize made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The National Child Labor Committee, along with its affiliates, validated the Protocol for Accompanied and Unaccompanied Minors, which outlines steps a labor inspector should take if one comes across a child laborer during an inspection. Moreover, the Terms of Reference for the new National Child Labor Policy were completed, but they have not yet been formalized in new legislation or regulation. Children in Belize are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in dangerous tasks in agriculture and construction. With the exception of some work categories that allow employment at age 14, the country's minimum age for work is 12 and does not meet international standards. In addition, the country lacks prohibitions against the use of children in illicit activities and does not appear to have programs to address child labor in agriculture, fisheries, or construction.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Belize are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in dangerous tasks in agriculture and construction. (1-4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Belize.

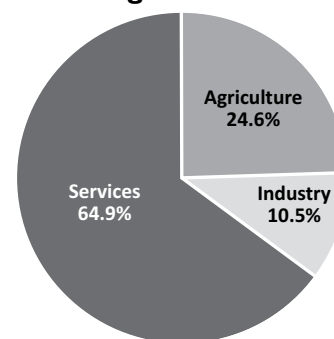
**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	1.6 (1,405)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	94.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	1.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		102.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from National Child Activity Survey (SIMPOC), 2013. (6)

**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 beans, bananas, citrus fruits, cereals, corn, rice, sugarcane, papayas, and vegetables (2-4,7-12)
	Fishing, including for fish, lobster, and conch (2-4,7,8)
	Butchering or raising livestock, including poultry and cattle (7,8,13)
Industry	Construction, carpentry, masonry, wood carving, carrying heavy loads, and using power tools (2-4,7,8)
	Quarrying, including operating stone crushers (3,8,9)
Services	Street and retail vending (3,4,8)
	Yard work, including using lawnmowers, weed-eaters, and machetes (7,8,13,14)
	Sewing (8)
	Working and cooking in food service, including using large mixers and grills (4,7,8,13)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Working in tourist sector, including in food and alcohol service and hospitality, and as tour guides, maintenance personnel, and security guards (2-4)
	Auto repair (7,8,13)
	Welding (8,13)
	Pumping gas (7,13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,15,16)
	Use in illicit activities, including trafficking of drugs and weapons (2-4,8,17)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Belize lacks a recent comprehensive child labor study, which makes it difficult to clearly determine the sectors and activities in which working children are engaged. Although there is a plan to conduct a more thorough study under the Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate, the last known data available are from a 2010 study on child activity funded by the ILO. (2,3) However, reports suggest that children in rural areas work in the agriculture and fishing industries, and children in urban areas work in the construction and tourist industries. Children work on family-owned farms and accompany adults to employment sites to assist in planting and harvesting. (2,4)

Among Belize’s ethnic groups, Mennonites had the highest percentage of child labor, with approximately 9.5 percent of Mennonite children engaged in child labor. (3,7,8,14) Non-Mennonite children are also engaged in child labor on Mennonite-owned land. (10) Children working on Mennonite land often use dangerous tools like machetes, tractors, and plows, and work long hours in the sun without proper hydration. (4,10,14) Limited reporting also indicates that boys working mainly in Mennonite communities may be involved in operating heavy machinery and flying small airplanes to spray crops. (2,3)

Children in Belize are also engaged in child labor in diving and fishing for fish, lobster, and conch. Many of these children cannot swim or may be involved in swimming at extreme depths, and have been injured working with dangerous tools such as anchors, fish traps, chipping hammers, and spears. (2-4,8)




Government officials indicate that Belize has a reputation as being a destination for child sexual exploitation, with reports of children being trafficked in areas frequented by tourists or seasonal workers, such as San Pedro, Punta Gorda, and Belize City. (3,15,16) Another trafficking trend in Belize is the "sugar daddy" phenomenon, in which a wealthy male offers to pay school fees, provide cash payments, or purchase groceries or gifts for a family in exchange for sexual favors from a young, usually female, family member. (18) Girls from impoverished communities and LGBTQI children are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking in Belize. (16,17,19) A limited number of sources also indicate that boys from Belize City and San Pedro were recruited to transport and sell drugs and firearms and commit murders as part of gang warfare. (2,3,14,17)

In Belize, primary and secondary education is tuition free up to age 14, but many children's access to education is hindered by the cost of school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and meals. (2,3,17,20,21) In 2020, approximately 60 percent of children benefited from a secondary school subsidy of \$150 per year toward education expenses. (4) Still, some Spanish-speaking children face language barriers at schools that provide instruction only in English. (10) In addition, Belize lacks qualified teachers, basic supplies, and facilities to educate children. (3)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Belize 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 Belize's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work and hazardous work.

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	12	Articles 54, 164, and 169 of the Labor Act; Articles 2–3 of the Shops Act (20,21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No	14	Articles 2 and 7 of the Families and Children Act; Articles 54 and 169 of the Labor Act (20,22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 8 of the Constitution; Articles 157–158 of the Labor Act (20,23)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 11–14 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act; Article 9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act; Articles 49–51 of the Criminal Code (24-26)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 2, 11, and 13–14 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Act; Articles 2–9 of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act; Articles 49–51 of the Criminal Code (24-26)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 16 of the Defence Act (27)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Articles 2 and 59 of the Education and Training Act; Articles 2 and 34 of the Education Act (28,29)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 70 of the Education and Training Act; Article 45 of the Education Act (28,29)

\* No conscription (27)

Belizean law does not conform to international standards because it sets the minimum age for employment at age 12. (20) However, the minimum legal age for work in wholesale and retail trade or business is set at age 14. (21) Belizean law is also inconsistent with international standards on hazardous work. Children under age 14 are prohibited from working in industrial undertakings—including activities such as mining, manufacturing, and construction—but children over age 14 are explicitly permitted to work in those types of activities. (20)

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Although Belizean law indicates that children under age 18 are prohibited from being employed or engaged in any activity that may be detrimental to their health, education, or mental, physical, or moral development, the law does not specify which employment activities are detrimental to children. (20,22) Belizean law is inconsistent with international standards on light work, because the types of light work permissible for children have not yet been identified. (20,30) In 2020, the National Child Labor Committee's Legislative Review Sub-Committee expanded the hazardous work and light work list after consulting with stakeholders. (2,4) Although the hazardous work and light work list was originally drafted in 2018, legislative delays have impeded the government's efforts to enact and amend this or other legislation addressing child labor concerns. As of December 2020, the committee had not finalized its review. (2,4) A list of hazardous work prohibited for all children has not been adopted as law. (30,31)

In addition, the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Prohibition) Act and the Criminal Code prohibit all forms of child sexual exploitation, with the former explicitly prohibiting child pornography. (24,25) However, consensual sex with children ages 16 or 17 is permitted, including in cases in which a person gives or promises remuneration, goods, food, or other benefits in exchange for the sexual act. This provision leaves children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (24,31) Research could not determine whether laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs. (32)

### 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 operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labor, and Local Government	Identifies cases and enforces laws related to child labor and hazardous child labor through its Labor Department. (9) During the reporting year, continued to implement the agenda items and maintain the curriculum of the Clear II project, which ended in 2019 and had provided the government with technical assistance to bring about meaningful reductions in child labor. (4)
Belize Police Department (BPD)	Investigates cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking through Sexual Offense and Family Violence Units. (3)
Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Technology	Investigates truancy offenses in schools and issues fines for these violations. (3,4,33)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecution	Prosecutes criminal offenses and quasi-criminal matters in court, including cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. (4,13)
Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate	Identifies, coordinates, and reports on all child labor activities; collaborates with stakeholders to assist with the monitoring and enforcement of laws and policies that relate to child labor; and consults, educates, and raises awareness of child labor. Deals with all issues related to child labor and enables criminal authorities and social services to reciprocally refer children found in child labor. (3) After the situation has been assessed, relevant agencies get involved, such as the Department of Human Services and BPD. In 2020, the Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate Desk attended the Laureates and Leaders for Children virtual summit on "Fair Share for Children," which included training on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized children and the prevention of children working during the pandemic. (4,13)
Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, Department of Human Services	Receives referrals for child labor cases; trains immigration officials, labor inspectors, and BPD in making referrals; and handles human trafficking cases. (34) Provides victims with welfare services, including medical and social services and counseling assistance. (9)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Belize took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws, including insufficient inspections and penalties to deter child labor violations.

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (3)	Unknown (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	25 (3)	23 (4)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (3)	Yes (20)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	N/A (3)	Yes (4)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (3)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	1,020 (3)	301 (4)
Number Conducted at Worksite	1,020 (3)	301 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (3)	0 (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (3)	Yes (20)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (4)

In 2020, the National Child Labor Committee, the Child Labor Secretariat, and the Inspectorate Desk validated the Protocol for Accompanied and Unaccompanied Minors, which outlines steps a labor inspector should take if one comes across a child laborer during an inspection. (4,16,35) The protocol was developed in consultation with the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council, and IOM. (4,16) In addition, the Labor Department coordinated with different government agencies to conduct Special Joint Child Labor Inspections in Corozal and Orange Walk districts in the agriculture and construction sectors. (4)

The government does not publish information regarding labor inspectorate funding. However, government officials indicate that the level of funding is insufficient and that the inspectorate has a need for more vehicles, fuel, and inspectors. (2,4) Although the Labor Department is required to visit every business at least once a year, it usually falls short of this goal due to a lack of resources. (2,8) In 2020, the number of inspections significantly decreased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, local NGOs report that the number of inspectors and funding is insufficient to conduct thorough and complete inspections, and that businesses in the Corozal Free Zones clear out their child workers prior to the inspectors' arrival, because unannounced inspections are difficult to implement. (4) Labor inspectors are able to assess penalties, but the current fine for child labor infractions is only \$13.50. Thus, inspections and penalties may be insufficient to deter child labor violations in Belize. (2,36) Training is provided to new inspectors; however, funding is insufficient to address the inspectorate's full need throughout the year for refresher training on existing laws. (2)

Child labor complaints can be submitted to the Labor Department, the Belize Police Department, or the Department of Human Services. Limited reporting from local NGOs and the private sector indicates that it is difficult to follow up on the status of complaints made. (2,4)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Belize 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 training for criminal investigators.

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**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (3)	N/A (4)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (3)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3,35)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	4 (1)	0 (4)
Number of Violations Found	0 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Convictions	0 (3)	0 (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (3)	No (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (4)

In 2020, courts were closed due to the pandemic from March through November, with very few sentencing sessions held between November and December, and no convictions were made. Moreover, no new criminal investigators were hired during the reporting year. (4)

There have been only two human trafficking convictions in Belize since 2005, only one of which involved a minor. Although the country's laws allow for the imprisonment of violators, human trafficking cases are often dismissed by lower courts. (1,36) Belize lacks official statistics on child sex tourism, and criminal investigators, police officers, and labor inspectors lacks sufficient resources—such as vehicles, fuel, office supplies, and adequate training—to investigate violations of criminal law, including the worst forms of child labor. (1,14)

## 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 Child Labor Committee	Coordinates efforts among ministries to combat child labor and implement the National Child Labor Policy. Led by the Ministry of Rural Transformation, Community Development, Labor, and Local Government and 14 government and civil society members. (37,38) The Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate serves as the Secretary for the Committee. During the reporting period, consulted with stakeholders such as the Belize Sugar Industries and the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry to further refine and expand the hazardous and light work lists, but did not finalize the review as of December 2020. (4) The Committee distinguishes between children engaged in work that is beneficial to their development and those engaged in the worst forms of child labor. (35,39)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Council	Identifies and rescues human trafficking victims, trains law enforcement officials, and educates the public about the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Led by the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Human Development; includes 12 other government agencies and civil society organizations. (40) During the reporting period, the Council validated the Protocol for Accompanied and Unaccompanied Minors, in consultation with the National Child Labor Committee and the Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate Desk, the Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, and IOM. (4,16)
National Committee for Families and Children	Promotes, monitors, and evaluates Belize's compliance with its national and international commitments to children, including the UN CRC. (4) Implements the National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents 2017–2030, which is also referred to as the Children's Agenda. Collaborates with the Child Labor Secretariat and Inspectorate on special assignments and projects. (4,11,41,42) In 2020, began coordination of the Road Map To End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Belize, which includes activities to increase awareness of commercial sexual exploitation legislation. (43,44)

## V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including implementation.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
National Child Labor Policy	Focuses on strengthening child labor laws, creating legislation to address existing gaps, and providing educational assistance to children who have been or who are currently engaged in child labor. (45,46) Aims to strengthen government institutions and services and to train labor officers. (38,46) During the reporting year, the Terms of Reference for the new National Child Labor Policy were completed and submitted to stakeholders for comment, but have not yet been formalized in new legislation or regulation. (4)
CARE Model	Coordinates the protection, care, and monitoring of sexually exploited and trafficked children. Outlines the role of the Department of Human Services and BPD in receiving allegations of commercial sexual exploitation of children and referring children to services. (3) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the CARE Model during the reporting period.
National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents (Children's Agenda) 2017–2030	Sets out the government's agenda and priorities to protect the rights of children and adolescents, including in education, health, economic security and opportunity, and protection from discrimination, abuse, and exploitation, including child labor. (11,41,42) Raises awareness of the role of families in promoting early childhood education. (42) Research was unable to determine what activities took place to implement the National Results Framework for Children and Adolescents during the reporting period.
Road Map To End Child Marriage and Early Unions in Belize†	Increases awareness of commercial sexual exploitation legislation, particularly to protect children between the ages of 15 and 17 from exploitation. Coordinated by the National Committee for Families and Children, in partnership with UNICEF. (43,44)

† 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. (19)

## VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, 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 the adequacy to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description
Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation	Conditional cash transfer program established in 2011. Continues to be implemented in Belize City in areas with the highest reported incidents of child sexual exploitation. (3) Provides small cash assistance to poor households subject to specific conditions, such as minimum school attendance of 85 percent. The program seeks to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children by wealthy men who pay families for access to vulnerable children. (3) In 2020, received \$12.4 million from the World Bank to provide social assistance to poor and vulnerable households impacted by the pandemic. (48)

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (49)

Research found no evidence of government programs to combat commercial sexual exploitation of children or to assist children working in agriculture, fisheries, or construction. (4) However, the government sponsored billboards specifically to combat child sex tourism at the international airport and at border crossing points. The government further participated in a multi-country program to identify and deny tourist entry to registered sex offenders. (50) During the reporting year, due to the pandemic and the change in government which occurred in November 2020, there were no new policies or programs created to address child labor. There were also no activities undertaken to expand funding and support for social programs. (4)

During the reporting year, teachers and education officials from eight public and private shelters received training on identifying human trafficking victims from the National Organization for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, which included staff from King's Children Home, Hopewell Children's Home, Liberty's Children's Home, Marla's Children's Home, Dorothy Menzies Child Care, Hope Haven Children's Home, Coral Grove Group Home, and 14 Miles Transitional Home. (18)

## 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 Belize (Table 11).

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**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 compulsory education age.	2020
	Ensure that the minimum age for work is age 14 in all sectors.	2013 – 2020
	Adopt a list of hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children and ensure that all children under age 18 are prohibited from engaging in hazardous work.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that the law prohibits all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children ages 16 and 17.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that laws prohibit the use of children in specific illicit activities, such as the production and trafficking of drugs.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2020
Enforcement	Publish complete information on enforcement efforts to combat child labor, including labor inspectorate funding.	2020
	Ensure that law enforcement agencies have sufficient resources, including vehicles, fuel, and inspectors, to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that the level of inspections and penalties are sufficient to deter child labor law violations.	2018 – 2020
	Implement and fund adequate training systems for inspectors and criminal investigators, including on the worst forms of child labor.	2018 – 2020
	Prosecute and impose criminal penalties for the worst forms of child labor, and ensure that courts hear and try human trafficking cases.	2017 – 2020
Government Policies	Publish activities undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor to address child labor during the reporting period.	2020
Social Programs	Conduct a comprehensive study of children’s activities to determine whether they are engaged in or at risk for involvement in the worst forms of child labor, to inform policies and programs.	2018 – 2020
	Increase access to education by eliminating fees; improving educational facilities; hiring additional qualified teachers; providing textbooks, uniforms, and meals; and addressing language barriers for Spanish-speaking students.	2011 – 2020
	Implement programs to address commercial sexual exploitation of children and programs to assist children working in agriculture, fisheries, and construction.	2019 – 2020

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