

In 2020, Benin made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The labor inspectorate nearly tripled the number of inspections conducted over the previous year, and the government passed legislation increasing the minimum age for apprenticeships from age 14 to 15. Moreover, the National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection met for the first time since 2017. However, children in Benin are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in the production of cotton and crushed granite, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in domestic work and street vending. There are many barriers to education, especially for children with disabilities. In addition, the government did not publicly release information on some of its criminal law enforcement efforts, and limited resources for the adequate enforcement of child labor laws may impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Benin are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in the production of cotton and crushed granite, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in domestic work and street vending. (1-3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Benin. 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	24.7 (unknown)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	67.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	16.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		64.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (4)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2017–2018. (5)

These data are not comparable with data presented in last year's report due to changes in survey source, survey questionnaire, and age range surveyed.

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 cotton† (2,6)
	Capturing,† cleaning, and descaling fish (3)
	Raising livestock† (7)
Industry	Collecting,† crushing,† washing,† and sieving stones† for gold mining,† and gravel† and granite quarrying† (1,8)
	Construction, including brickmaking† (8)
Services	Domestic work† (1,3)
	Working as mechanics† and in the transportation industry† (3,8)
	Street vending† (3,9,10)
	Dressmaking† and carpentry† (7)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in domestic work, vending, construction, handicraft activities, artisanal mining, fishing, granite quarrying, and agriculture, including in the production of cotton, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,8,12)
	Forced begging (13)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,14)

† 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.

Child trafficking occurs mostly within Benin but also to other countries, primarily Gabon, Nigeria, and the Republic of the Congo, and for purposes of domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and work in vending, agriculture, and mining. Children living in the northern regions of Benin are the most vulnerable to human trafficking. (1,3,13,15) Traditionally, under a practice known locally as *vidomègon*, children live with relatives or family friends and perform household services in exchange for educational opportunities. A majority of these children are girls, and many become victims of labor exploitation and sexual abuse. (1,3,13,16)




Evidence suggests that incidences of abuse, including corporal punishment and rape of students by teachers, hamper education access even though the government outlawed corporal punishment in 2015. (3,13,17) Children with disabilities also have especially limited access to the regular education system, and a lack of reliable transportation forces some children to walk long distances to school. (16,18-20) In rural areas, children are often unregistered due to parents' limited understanding of the procedures for receiving a birth certificate and the associated costs. Since birth certificates are required to enroll in school, some unregistered children may be denied access to education. (3,18,21,22)

During the reporting period, the government continued to conduct the Administrative Census for the Identification of the Population, an effort to comprehensively collect personal data on all Beninese citizens, including newborns and children, to create a national digital database and issue national biometric identification cards. Each registered Beninese citizen will be issued a biometric card bearing a unique identification number to be used for civil and administrative purposes. (23) The Directorate of Civil Registration, with the assistance of UNICEF, ran a project that permitted the issuance of birth certificates during routine vaccinations. The effort allowed 10,171 children whose births were registered in hospitals to get their birth certificates. (23)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Benin 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 Benin’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a minimum age for work that is lower than the age for compulsory education.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Article 166 and 301 of the Labor Code; Article 210 of the Child Code (24,25)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 210 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 1 of the Hazardous Occupations List (25,26)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Hazardous Occupations List (26)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (24,25,27)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Articles 2–4, 6, 18, and 22 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 212 and 352–353 of the Child Code; Articles 499–501 and 504 of the Penal Code (24,25,27,28)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3 of the Law on the Prevention and Repression of Violence Against Women; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 212 and 378 of the Child Code; Article 504 of the Penal Code (25,27–29)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (25,27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 6 of Law 2005-43 (30)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 6 of Law 2005-43; Title II, Article 32 of the Constitution (30,31)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 2 and 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (27)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 24 of Act N° 2003-17; Article 4 of the Law on the Prevention and Repression of Violence Against Women (29,32)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 13 of the Constitution; Article 114 of the Child Code (25,31)

On February 26, 2020, Decree (*Arrêté*) no. 012 was passed, which increased the minimum age for apprenticeships from age 14 to age 15 in both the formal and informal sectors. (33) As the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (3,34) In addition, Article 22 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors prescribes insufficient penalties, especially in comparison to punishments for other serious crimes, such as rape. (7,27)

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.

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (MOLCS)	Enforces child labor laws and investigates labor code infractions, including those related to child labor. (11,35) Refers cases of child labor to Social Promotion Centers (<i>Centres de Promotion Sociale</i> or CPSs). (22) In 2020, MOLCS, with the support of UNICEF, organized a meeting with ministries involved in child labor prevention to discuss ways to curb child labor in sectors in which it is most prevalent. (23)
Ministry of the Interior and Public Security	Enforces criminal laws related to the protection of minors, including the worst forms of child labor, through the Central Office for the Protection of Minors (OCPM) under the Criminal Police Department. (36,37) Through OCPM, maintains a child trafficking database—Benin's Children (<i>Enfants du Benin</i>)—to track and process child trafficking cases, and implements standard operating procedures that seek to improve the quality of services, harmonize police activities, and create a stronger working relationship between the police and other actors involved in child protection. In 2020, OCPM continued to expand local offices throughout the country and provide police with specific training for addressing abuses of children. (3) Through its vice squad (Brigade des Moeurs), the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security addresses human trafficking for sexual exploitation. (34) Although the government allocated a budget of approximately \$118,000 (70 million CFA) to OCPM in 2019, an increase of 34 percent from the previous year, the budget allocation for this reporting period is not yet available. (23)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$207,000 (3)	\$200,000 (23)
Number of Labor Inspectors	35 (22)	35 (23)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (3)	Yes (24)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown (3)	No (23)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (3)	No (23)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (3)	No (23)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	746 (3)	2,070 (23)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (3)	2,070 (23)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	463 (3)	1,273 (23)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	2 (22)	0 (23)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	2 (22)	N/A (23)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (23)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (23)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (3)	Yes (24)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (3)	Yes (23)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (23)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (23)

During the reporting period, officials conducted more than 2,000 inspections, a dramatic increase over the previous year. (23) This was due, in part, to the government decentralizing labor inspections and basing inspectors close to their designated inspection areas. Inspections were conducted in open-air markets, workshops, bars, restaurants, and other worksites. (23) Furthermore, UNICEF provided additional financial support that contributed to the increased number of inspections. (38) The inspection teams observed 1,273 violations of labor standards and provisions related to child labor, including failure to observe the minimum age of employment, lack of apprenticeship contracts, and poor hygiene and safety conditions. (23,39) However, the scope of labor law enforcement may not have been sufficient as there were no inspections conducted in the agriculture or mining sectors. (23) In addition to 35 full-time labor inspectors, the government has employed an additional 25 administrators and controllers to conduct labor inspections. (22)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Benin's workforce, which includes more than 3.5 million workers. According to ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Benin would employ about 92 inspectors. (40,41) Sources indicate that the labor inspectorate's continued lack of financial resources hampered its ability to conduct labor inspections. (3,11) At the departmental level, the government conducted labor inspections in marketplaces, workshops, bars, restaurants, and other places in which children are exploited. Nonetheless, the national level labor inspection team did not have funding to supervise any inspections completed at the departmental level. (23)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Benin 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.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (3)	No (23)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (3)	N/A (23)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (22,37)	No (23)
Number of Investigations	2 (3)	Unknown (23)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (3)	Unknown (23)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (3)	Unknown (23)
Number of Convictions	2 (3)	Unknown (23)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (3)	No (23)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	No (3)	Yes (23)

The government has a mechanism to enable criminal authorities and social services to reciprocally refer children found in the worst forms of child labor and human trafficking, and civil servants regularly refer cases. The government also uses its child assistance hotline, which was launched in 2020, to refer cases of child labor, particularly those involving domestic servitude, because the hotline allows for anonymous tips. (23) The government did not provide information on its criminal law enforcement efforts regarding the number of investigations, the number of violations found, the number of prosecutions initiated, or the number of convictions for the purpose of this report. (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 coordination among agencies.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (Comite Directeur National de Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants, CDN)	Coordinates efforts to address child labor, falls under the jurisdiction of MOLCS, and includes delegates from ILO, UNICEF, trade unions, local NGOs, and other government ministries. (3) During the reporting period, CDN held a 3-day session, which was attended by 25 officials from government bodies, NGOs, trade unions, and employers' associations. Participants reviewed and approved a communications plan to fight child labor with a focus on the worst forms of child labor. (23) Participants also discussed the situation of child labor in Benin's open-space markets and new strategies to address it. (23)
National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection (CNSCPE)	Established by decree in 2006 and chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance's Secretary General. Includes five technical committees: (1) trafficking and exploitation, (2) juvenile justice, (3) violence against children, (4) orphans and vulnerable children, and (5) early childhood. (23) Each committee has an action plan and may propose other activities to CNSCPE. Has 40 members drawn from various organizations involved with children's issues, including government ministries, NGOs, donor agencies, and international and bilateral technical partners. In June 2020, CNSCPE met for the first time since 2017. (23)

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Inter-Ministerial Task Force to Combat Trafficking in Persons	Coordinates government efforts to address trafficking in persons through five committees: (1) prosecution, (2) prevention and protection, (3) statistics, (4) intellectual, and (5) policy. Led by the Ministry of Planning and Development and includes representatives of other key ministries and NGOs. (23,37,42) This Inter-Ministerial Task force did not meet in 2020. (23,42)
Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance	Offers social assistance and social support services to vulnerable populations and is the lead agency for child protection in Benin. (23,35) Through its Office of Family, Childhood, and Adolescence, provides assistance to trafficking victims by means of 85 CPS across the country. (7,12,22) Through the Family and Child Monitoring Office, maintains a database on child trafficking. (12) In 2020, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance continued to assist foreign trafficking victims, predominantly minors, before repatriating them to their home countries. (15)

Research found that there is a lack of effective coordination among agencies responsible for addressing the needs of vulnerable children. (3,22,23)

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 incorporating and implementing child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Education Sector Plan.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2019–2023)	Aims to reduce the worst forms of child labor in Benin by 70 percent by the end of 2023. Targets six focus areas: (1) strengthening the legislative and institutional framework related to child labor; (2) information, awareness, and social mobilization; (3) education and training; (4) victim monitoring, protection and referral; (5) inspection and suppression; (6) institutional mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation of the plan. (23) No action was taken to further this policy during the reporting period. (39)
Cooperative Agreement to Combat Cross-Border Trafficking	Aims to protect migrant children and victims of trans-border human trafficking. On December 23, 2019, the Government of Benin signed a tripartite cooperative agreement with Burkina Faso and Togo committing to cooperate and assist each other in the investigation of human trafficking offenses. (3) On January 7, 2020, 14 law enforcement and government officials from Benin and Togo, with the support of international partners, held a 2-day session in Grand-Popo, Benin, to share experiences and discuss the challenges they face in fighting human trafficking in the two countries. Participants developed a Joint Strategic Actions Paper to strengthen the mechanism in place for combatting cross border human trafficking. (39)
National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons (2020–2024)	Aims to eradicate human trafficking in Benin by strengthening governmental systems and institutional framework. (43,44) During the reporting period, the government provided resources to implement this policy; however, research showed that these resources were inadequate. (39,44)

† 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. (17)

The Education Sector Plan (2018–2030) aims to improve access to education, including targeted interventions for orphaned children and children outside of the formal education system. However, the Education Sector Plan does not incorporate child labor elimination and prevention strategies. (6,45)

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 with the adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Government-Funded Shelters†	CPS provide food, shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable children, including victims of labor exploitation, in 85 centers. (3) OCPM also operates an interim care facility for human trafficking survivors before their placement in a long-term shelter. (3,7) During the reporting period, the government reduced the available capacity of these shelters in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the shelters continued to function and support child trafficking survivors. (23)
Government-Funded Retraining Centers†	MOLCS, with the assistance of UNICEF, maintains a vocational school program to train survivors of child trafficking in a trade. (46) During the reporting period, UNICEF continued to fund and implement the program in which survivors of child abuse, including child trafficking and exploitation, are schooled or trained in a trade through a program called Second Chance School (<i>Ecole de Seconde Chance</i>). (39)
Integrated National School Feeding Program (2017–2021)†	\$87 million Government of Benin-funded program managed by the World Food Program. (47) In 2020, the program covered 3,995 schools across Benin and helped reduce the number of school dropouts. (23)
McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (2019–2023)	U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded project implemented by Catholic Relief Services in the Alibori and Borgou regions. Aims to improve the literacy and attendance of school-age children, improve the health and dietary practices of students, and increase government capacity of and investment in school meal programs. (48) In 2020, the Government of Benin continued to fund the largest portion of this program. (23,49)
Rapid Pro	In November 2018, the government and UNICEF launched a platform (Rapid Pro) to allow parents to declare births through SMS text message, sparing parents the challenges related to the issuance of birth certificates. In 2020, the program registered the births of 1,679 children less than 1 year old. (23)

† Program is funded by the Government of Benin.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (11,50-52)

Although the Government of Benin has implemented programs to protect children from human trafficking, research was unable to determine whether the government implements programs to assist children engaged in other worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and agriculture. (37)

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 Benin (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 – 2020
	Create meaningful penalties for the transport and trafficking of minors and crimes involving labor exploitation.	2014 – 2020
Enforcement	Provide initial training and refresher courses on child labor for labor inspectors and criminal law enforcement officials.	2013 – 2020
	Increase financial resources to enforce laws against child labor.	2009 – 2020
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2015 – 2020
	Conduct inspections in sectors that have the highest incidence of child labor, such as in agriculture and mining.	2019 – 2020
	Publish criminal law enforcement data as it relates to the worst forms of child labor, including the number of investigations, violations found, prosecutions initiated, number of convictions, and whether penalties were imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2020
Coordination	Ensure that coordinating bodies meet and report their activities, including the Inter-Ministerial Task Force to Combat Trafficking in Persons.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure effective coordination among agencies on procedures and social services for abused and vulnerable children.	2019 – 2020
Government Policies	Ensure that existing policies addressing child labor are implemented as intended including the National Action Plans against both the Worst Forms of Child Labor and Trafficking in Persons.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure that child labor elimination and prevention strategies are integrated into the Education Sector Plan.	2010 – 2020

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Increase access to education by ensuring the safety of children in schools, providing access to schools for children with disabilities, providing reliable transportation to schools, and increasing birth registration rates.	2010 – 2020
	Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and agriculture; and monitor and report annually on the progress of these programs.	2010 – 2020

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