

In 2020, Comoros made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed a new penal code that criminalizes child trafficking, forced labor, and hazardous child labor. It also raised its compulsory education age to 16, in line with international standards. In addition, Comoros reactivated its anti-trafficking task force and developed a new anti-trafficking action plan. However, children in Comoros are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in agriculture. Children also perform dangerous tasks in domestic work. Limited resources for the enforcement of child labor laws may impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. Furthermore, labor and criminal investigators lack the resources and funds necessary to enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor, and Comoros lacks a national action plan to combat child labor. Finally, social programs to combat child labor may be insufficient to adequately address the extent of the problem.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Comoros are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in agriculture. Children also perform dangerous tasks in domestic work. (1-3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Comoros.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	23.0 (42,145)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	81.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	20.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		76.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, 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), 2012. (5)

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 manioc,† beans,† vanilla,† cloves,† and ylang-ylang† (3,6,7)
	Animal husbandry† (1,3,7)
	Fishing† (1,3,7)
Industry	Construction,† including in carpentry† (1,3,7)
	Extracting and selling marine sand (3,6)
Services	Domestic work† (1,7,8)
	Street vending (1,9)
	Repairing cars† and bicycles,† including tire vulcanization,† and battery charging† (1,6)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in domestic work, construction, street vending, baking, fishing, and agriculture (2,6,7,10)

† 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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Data detailing the prevalence of children engaged in the worst forms of child labor in Comoros are not available; however, anecdotal reports suggest that some children are subjected to domestic servitude and forced labor in the agricultural and fishing sectors. (3,10) Children from poor or rural families are at higher risk of being placed into forced labor. (3,11) Some parents who are unable to care for their children send them to wealthier families, who are expected to provide food, shelter, and schooling for the children in exchange for housework. In practice, some may become domestic workers and victims of labor exploitation and abuse. (3,7,11,12) In Comoros, it is a traditional practice to send children to Koranic teachers to receive an education. Some Koranic teachers, however, may force their students to work rather than attend school, or to earn funds to pay school fees; girls usually perform domestic work, and boys perform agricultural labor. (3,11-13) In nearby Mayotte, which is administered by France, reports indicate that there are more than 3,000 unaccompanied children from Comoros, some of whom are exploited in the worst forms of child labor or may be vulnerable to trafficking. (2,11,14) There are reports that drug traffickers use teenagers to transport drugs on boats to Mayotte. (7)




Children in Comoros often work on family farms or family fishing boats, performing agricultural tasks with sharp tools, carrying heavy loads of products, and climbing tall heights to harvest fruit. In construction, children work without basic safety or protective equipment. (7)

In 2020, Comoros revised its education law, raising the compulsory age of education up from 12 years of age previously. (3,15) The law establishes compulsory education between ages 3 and 16. (16) However, no law establishes free basic education. (3,17,15) Although approximately equal numbers of boys and girls attended public primary schools, fewer girls completed primary education. Due to a lack of facilities to accommodate female menstrual cycles, girls often miss school or leave altogether. (3,13,18) Furthermore, poor school infrastructure, the limited availability of teachers, and physical and sexual violence in schools may impede access to education and increase the vulnerability of children to the worst forms of child labor. (3,7,8,19)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

On January 25, 2020, the President of Comoros issued Decree No. 20-024-PR, which allowed Comoros to begin the ratification process with the UN on the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. (7,11) Comoros officially acceded to the Protocol in June of 2020. (3,20) Comoros has thus 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 Comoros's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of minimum age protections for all children.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Article 129 of the Labor Code (21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 131(d) of the Labor Code; Article 7 of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking (21,22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		List of Dangerous Occupations; Article 131(d) of the Labor Code; Article 7 of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking (21-23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2.1 and 131 of the Labor Code; Article 13 of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking (21,22)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Article 131 of the Labor Code; Articles 13 and 14 of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking (21,22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 131 of the Labor Code; Articles 8–11 and 13 of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking; Articles 322 and 323 of the Penal Code (21,22,25)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 131(c) of the Labor Code; Article 6(c) of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking (21,22)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Articles 41, 52, and 58 of Law No. 97-06/AF (26)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 6(a) of the Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking (22)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 2 of the Outline Act on the Education System; Article 4 on the Decree on Education Policy (17,16)
Free Public Education	No		Article 1 of the Outline Act on the Education System; Preamble of the Constitution (17,27)

* No conscription (28)

In 2020, Comoros's National Assembly passed a new penal code that criminalizes child trafficking, forced child labor, child labor in hazardous occupations, and other instances of the worst forms of child labor. Under the law, convicted child traffickers are subject to a 10 to 20 year prison sentence and fines up to \$75,000. (10,24) However, Comoros's Law to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking defines child trafficking as requiring the use of force, fraud, or coercion. (2,22) While the Labor Code does not stipulate this requirement, it also does not exclude the means of force, fraud, or coercion for child trafficking victims. (13,21,22) The new Penal Code also does not exclude the means of force, fraud, or coercion for child trafficking victims. (24) Thus, Comoros's child trafficking laws do not meet international standards.

The Labor Code allows children under age 15 to perform light work in domestic work or agriculture if it does not interfere with their education or physical or moral development. The Labor Code, however, does not set 13 as the minimum age for light work, specify the conditions under which light work may be conducted, or limit the number of hours for light work, as defined by international standards on child labor. (13,17,21) In addition, the Labor Code applies only to workers who perform work under a formal employment agreement, which does not conform to international standards requiring that all children be protected under the law establishing a minimum age for work. (13,21)

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 child labor laws.

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Enforces child labor laws, investigates allegations of child labor, and refers cases of the worst forms of child labor for criminal investigation. (3,13)
Police Morals and Minors Brigade	Investigates allegations of child abuse, including child trafficking, and refers cases for prosecution. (1,29,30) Operates nationwide, covering the islands of Grande Comore, Anjouan, and Mohéli. Collaborates with <i>Services d'Écoute</i> (Listening Services). (6,31)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes criminal cases, including those related to child trafficking. Has specialized courts for minors, with judges responsible for the prosecution of cases involving forced labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. (1,3,28)
National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms	Receives complaints about the worst forms of child labor, investigates violations, and refers cases to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution. (9,32)

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	0 (7)	0 (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	4 (7)	3 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (21)	Yes (21)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (7)	N/A (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (7)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (7)	Yes (21)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	12 (7)	80 (3)
Number Conducted at Worksite	12 (7)	80 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (7)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (7)	N/A (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (7)	N/A (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (7)	Yes (21)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	No (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (3)

During the reporting period, the labor inspectorate significantly increased its number of inspections compared to the previous year, with inspectors conducting on-site visits to verify compliance with COVID-19 pandemic regulations. However, none of the inspections were child-labor specific. (3)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Comoros's workforce, which includes approximately 278,500 workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Comoros would employ about 7 inspectors. (33,34) Reports indicate that there is a lack of training, equipment, transportation, and funding available to conduct child labor inspections and legal proceedings. (2,3,31,34,35) Inspectors have indicated that although there is a budget for fixed costs such as salaries, there is no operating budget for the labor inspectorate, and labor inspectors have to rely on their own funds for costs such as transportation. (2,3,7)

Although the labor inspectorate is permitted to conduct unannounced inspections, in practice, inspectors usually only respond when MOL receives complaints, and they conduct inspections only in the formal sector, even though most child labor is concentrated in the informal sector. The labor inspectorate is required to submit

a yearly report detailing its work, including statistics on inspections, offenses identified, and penalties imposed; however, no report of this type was identified during the reporting period. (3) Finally, although a reciprocal referral mechanism was established under the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Comoros 2010–2015, it does not appear that this mechanism is currently active. (3)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Comoros took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Police Morals and Minors Brigade that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including allocating financial and human resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (7)	No (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (7)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (7)	Yes (10)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (7)	Unknown (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (3)

During the reporting period, the National Commission for Human Rights and Liberty partnered with UNICEF to conduct training for 60 members of the National Police and Gendarmerie on trafficking in persons concepts. Similarly, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force worked with UNODC to conduct a series of virtual trainings related to the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. (3,36)

Reports indicate that a lack of trained staff, equipment, transportation, and funding inhibit criminal law enforcement efforts on the worst forms of child labor. (2,3,30)

The government did not provide comprehensive data on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report.

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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Committee Against Child Labor	Coordinates government efforts on child labor. Chaired by MOL. (1,8) Research could not determine whether the National Committee Against Child Labor was active or received funding during the reporting period.
Inter-Agency Anti-Trafficking Task Force*	Reconstituted in late December of 2019 under the direction of the Foreign Ministry. Comprises multiple government agencies, the <i>Services d'Écoute</i> , NGOs, and international organizations. Leads government efforts in anti-trafficking policies. (3) During the reporting period, the Task Force adopted a short-term national action plan to combat trafficking in persons in 2020. (3,36)
National Commission for Solidarity, Social Protection, and the Promotion of Gender	Coordinates new government efforts to strengthen partnerships with state and non-state actors engaged in child protection issues. (7) Research could not determine whether the Commission was active or received funding during the reporting period.

* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

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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 Policy for the Protection of Children (2016–2021)	Aims to improve child protection in Comoros; includes components to combat the worst forms of child labor, with a focus on child trafficking. Led by the Ministry of Health, Solidarity, Social Cohesion, and Gender Promotion. (1,8,29,37) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Policy for the Protection of Children during the reporting period.
Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan†	Drafted in 2020, outlines nine strategic priorities and identifies the roles various government ministries play within those priorities. Managed by the Inter-Agency Anti-Trafficking Task Force, includes goals such as improving resources for law enforcement personnel responsible for responding to child trafficking cases, and working with international stakeholders to combat the trafficking of children from Comoros to Mayotte. (3,38)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Although child labor is integrated into some government policies, Comoros has not adopted a new national action plan to address child labor. (7)

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 adequacy of efforts to address the problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Listening Services (<i>Services d'Écoute</i>)†	Government program that provides protective services and offers immediate assistance to vulnerable and abused children. Comprises four government-operated units on the islands of Anjouan, Grande Comore, and Mohéli. (31,44-46) Investigates allegations of violence against children, including the worst forms of child labor, and refers perpetrators to criminal authorities for prosecution. (7,31,47) During the reporting period, the program reported it had provided services to 189 children and women across all three islands, including counseling, legal guidance, medical support, and protection. (3)
UNICEF Country Program (2015–2021)	\$20,885 UNICEF-funded program that supports the government's efforts to strengthen children's rights to survival, development, education, protection, and social inclusion. (47,39) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the program during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Comoros.

An independent evaluation of *Services d'Écoute* found that it responded to the needs of child victims of violence and improved the professionalism of those responding to child victims. However, program personnel lack relevant training in social services provision and in international standards on child protection, which has resulted in incomplete casework and a lack of follow up with, or evaluations of, child victims. (46,48)

Although the government has programs that target child labor, their scope is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, particularly in agriculture and domestic work. (28-30,49)

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 Comoros (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law's light work provisions set 13 as the minimum age, prescribe the number of hours per week that light work may be undertaken, and specify the conditions under which light work may be conducted, as defined by international standards on child labor.	2012 – 2020
	Establish by law the right to free basic education.	2020
	Ensure that the law's minimum age for work provisions and protections apply to children in unpaid or non-contractual work.	2015 – 2020
	Align child sex trafficking laws with international standards by ensuring that force, fraud, or coercion are not required elements in child trafficking cases.	2019 – 2020
Enforcement	Provide the labor inspectorate with an operating budget for resources, training, transportation, and equipment to provide adequate coverage of the workforce.	2009 – 2020
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure that inspectors carry out inspections in the informal sector.	2020
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate uses its authority to conduct unannounced inspections rather than relying solely on complaints received to initiate inspections.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate fulfills its mandate to collect and publish data and statistics related to inspection efforts.	2019 – 2020
	Establish and use a functioning reciprocal mechanism between labor enforcement authorities and social services.	2019 – 2020
	Publish information on the number of criminal law investigations, violations found, penalties assessed, prosecutions initiated, and convictions related to cases of the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2020
	Increase the number of trained criminal law enforcement personnel and trainings, as well as the allocation of resources, transportation, and equipment, to enhance criminal law enforcement efforts related to the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that there are sufficient funds and resources to investigate crimes related to the worst forms of child labor.	2018 – 2020
Coordination	Ensure that coordinating mechanisms are active and receive adequate funding to fulfill their missions.	2014 – 2020
Government Policies	Ensure that relevant policies are implemented, address child labor-related mandates, and report on yearly activities.	2019 – 2020
	Adopt a new National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor and develop other relevant policies to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2016 – 2020
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers to education, including for girls and poor children, by increasing school capacity, infrastructure, and teacher availability, and by addressing school violence.	2014 – 2020
	Collect and publish data on the prevalence of child labor and the types of work children perform in Comoros.	2019 – 2020
	Ensure that social program personnel, such as those in the <i>Services d'Écoute</i> , have adequate and relevant training to be able to appropriately respond to the needs of child victims, including those abused by religious leaders.	2019 – 2020
	Implement and expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, particularly in agriculture and domestic work.	2009 – 2020

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