

In 2020, Kiribati made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the government published results from the Social Development Indicator Survey conducted in 2018–2019, which provides statistics on child labor. In addition, the government established the Education Sector Contingency Plan for COVID-19 and secured a grant from the Global Partnership for Education to develop remote learning interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Kiribati engage in dangerous tasks in construction and street vending. Existing laws do not identify hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children, and do not prohibit the domestic trafficking of children. In addition, the government has not adopted a national policy to combat the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Kiribati engage in dangerous tasks in construction and street vending. (1) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Kiribati. 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	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		100.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2016, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (2)

Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2021. (3)

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
Industry	Construction, cargo loading, and seafaring (1,4)
Services	Street work, including vending and working in kava bars (1)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, including aboard fishing vessels (1,4,5)

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

During the reporting period, the government published results from the Social Development Indicator Survey, which was conducted in 2018–2019 by the Kiribati National Statistics Office and the Ministry of Health, with support from UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, the Pacific Community, and the Government of Australia. (6) According to the survey, 25.4 percent of children ages 5–17 are involved in child labor, with 14.9 percent of those children working under hazardous conditions. However, the survey results did not include information on the specific sectors in which children are engaged in work in Kiribati. (6–8) Although the report does not identify specific sectors, children living in rural areas and poorer households were more likely to be more engaged in hazardous conditions compared to children in urban areas or wealthier households. (8)

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Evidence indicates that girls are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. (5) Underage girls were allegedly subjected to commercial sexual exploitation with crewmembers from foreign fishing vessels. In exchange, the girls were given cash, alcohol, food, and goods. (1,4,8)




Under the Free Education Policy, the government provides free education—including tuition, stationery, and transportation—to children. Through collaborations with UNICEF and the Government of Australia, the government has improved learning spaces, access, and sanitation at schools. (8) The Government of Kiribati also worked with UNICEF to strengthen birth registrations by conducting free mobile registration clinics in outer islands. Children do not experience barriers to education due to a lack of identity documents, their disability status, or access to schools from remote islands. (8)

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions to children's education, the Ministry of Education established the Education Sector Contingency Plan for COVID-19 and secured a grant from the Global Partnership for Education. The grant helped to develop materials for remote learning interventions. (8)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Kiribati 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 Kiribati's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including identification of hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children and the prohibition of child trafficking.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Section 115 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 117 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 244 and 249 of the Penal Code; Sections 118(1)(a, c, d) and 122 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,10)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Section 43 of the Measures to Combat Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime Act; Section 118(1)(b) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,11)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 136 and 141–142 of the Penal Code; Sections 118(1)(f), 118(1)(g), and 118(2) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,10)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 142 of the Penal Code; Sections 118(1)(h) and 118(1)(i) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,10)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A†		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Sections 118(1)(e) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Section 7 of the Education Act (12)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 11 of the Education Act (12)

† No standing military

The government has not identified by national law or regulations the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. Under Article 116 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code, the laws do not specify the activities and hours of work per week that are acceptable for children engaged in light work, or the conditions under which light work can be undertaken. (9) During the reporting period, the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources (MEHR) reviewed the drafted types of hazardous work prohibited and regulations relating to light work for children. However, completion of the regulations is delayed due to the lack of in-house legal capabilities within MEHR. (8) Kiribati's laws prohibiting child trafficking are insufficient because they do not specifically prohibit various acts involved in the recruitment, harboring, transportation, transfer, and receipt of child trafficking. (9,11) 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. (9,12)

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 Employment and Human Resources (MEHR)	Enforces labor laws, including those related to child labor. (13)
Kiribati Police Force	Enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (8) Investigates cases of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children through a special Domestic Violence and Sexual Offenses Unit. (14)
Child Protection Officer, Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports and Social Affairs (MWYSSA)	Removes children from harmful situations, including as a result of sexual exploitation and harsh or exploitative labor. (13,15) Assists with the implementation of the Children, Young People and Family Welfare Act. (16) Coordinates the Safenet referral system. (8)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Kiribati took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MEHR that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including labor inspector training.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$10,000 (1)	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspectors	3 (1)	5 (8)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (1)	Yes (9)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (1)	No (8)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	No (1)	No (8)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	133 (1)	63 (8)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (1)	63 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (1)	0 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (1)	0 (8)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (1)	0 (8)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Routine Inspections Targeted	No (1)	No (8)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (1)	Yes (9)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (1)	No (8)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1)	Yes (8)

The government has a standard operating procedure that outlines how to conduct labor inspections and includes a checklist template that requires information on the ages of all workers. (8) Resource and capacity constraints restrict the government's services and activities related to labor law enforcement. Although the number of labor inspectors meets the ILO's technical advice, the government's limited ability to inspect and report on child labor issues was further affected by geographical distances, isolation, sparse population, and Internet connectivity challenges. (1,4) In addition, the government did not hold training on child labor laws due to pandemic border restrictions, which limited travel in Kiribati. (8)

Criminal Law Enforcement

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

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (1)	No (8)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (1)	No (8)
Number of Investigations	0 (1)	Unknown (8)
Number of Violations Found	0 (1)	Unknown (8)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (1)	Unknown (8)
Number of Convictions	0 (1)	Unknown (8)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (1)	Unknown (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1)	Yes (8)

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
Kiribati National Human Rights Taskforce (KNHRT)	Coordinates national UN reports. (4) MEHR and MWYSSA are members. (1,17) KNHRT was active during the reporting period. (18)
Child Protection Working Group	Coordinates child protection issues with MWYSSA. Oversees the implementation of the Child, Young People and Family Welfare Act. (1,16) During the reporting period, MWYSSA conducted training for all welfare officers engaging in social work with children. The participants included 6 officers at the national level and 23 officers based in island councils throughout the country. (8)

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 coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Children, Young People, and Families Welfare System Policy, 2013	Focuses on strengthening the welfare system, in part, by implementing services to prevent the abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation of children and young people, including in hazardous labor. (15) During the reporting period, UN Women and the Kiribati Police facilitated training for stakeholders on the children protection policy. (18)
United Nations Pacific Strategy (2018–2022)	A multi-national strategic framework, comprising 14 South Pacific nations, created to address, develop, and implement strategic economic development priorities in the South Pacific, including eliminating child labor and the worst forms of child labor. (19)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (1,8)

During the reporting period, the Government of Kiribati continued to support existing policies on child protection and strengthening the education sector. However, research found no evidence of a policy that focuses specifically on combating the worst forms of child labor. (5,8)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy to address the problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
UNICEF Pacific Multi-Country Child Protection Program (2018–2022)	Multi-country program in 14 Pacific Island countries. (20) Prioritizes children's rights, including the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. Aligned with the UN Pacific Strategy 2018–2022. (20) During the reporting period, the program supported child protection activities, including the Social Development Indicator Survey. (18)
Safenet†	MWYSSA-coordinated program that allows government, churches, and NGOs to provide assistance to victims found in exploitative and violent situations. (13,21) During the reporting period, MWYSSA expanded the Safenet system by establishing a COVID-19 Helpline in response to concerns related to the pandemic and the possible violence and exploitation of children. (8)
Hotlines†	MWYSSA- and police-supported 24-hour hotlines for children to report violations, request information, or obtain access to services. (21) This program was active during the reporting period. (18)

† Program is funded by the Government of Kiribati.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (1,4,8)

During the reporting period, the Government of Kiribati secured a grant from the Global Partnership for Education to hold training programs for educators and education stakeholders on remote learning interventions for use during the pandemic. (8)

Although the government has implemented programs to assist children in exploitative and abusive situations, research found no evidence that the government has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children who are engaged in construction and street vending work, or young girls subjected to commercial sexual exploitation with crew members from foreign fishing vessels.

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 Kiribati (Table 11).

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Determine the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2011 – 2020
	Ensure that the law specifies the activities and number of hours of work per week that are acceptable for children engaged in light work, and the conditions under which children can engage in light work.	2015 – 2020
	Establish law that prohibits the domestic trafficking of children and the various acts involved in recruitment, harboring, transportation, transfer, and receipt of child trafficking.	2015 – 2020
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2020
Enforcement	Publish information on the labor inspectorate's funding.	2020
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by ensuring sufficient resources to support labor law enforcement activities and initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents.	2017 – 2020
	Institutionalize training on child labor laws for labor inspectors and criminal investigators, including initial training for new inspectors and investigators and refresher courses.	2017 – 2020
	Publish criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of investigations, violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions, and whether penalties were imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2020
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses the worst forms of child labor.	2014 – 2020
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor in all sectors to inform policies and programs.	2017 – 2020
	Implement social programs to address all relevant forms of child labor, including in construction and street vending.	2017 – 2020
	Implement programs to address the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of young girls with crew members from foreign fishing vessels.	2018 – 2020

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