

In 2020, Lebanon made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting year, the Internal Security Forces reported conducting two training sessions, one for social violence and child labor and a separate training for junior officers who will be in charge of judicial investigations in regional units. However, children in Lebanon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in construction and in forced labor in agriculture, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in the production of potatoes and tobacco. Laws related to forced labor do not meet international standards as there is no legislative provision that provides criminal penalties for forced labor, and debt bondage is not criminally prohibited. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labor's budget was unable to cover equipment, personnel, and transportation costs to conduct inspections. In addition, labor inspectors do not have the authority to inspect informal workplaces, in which child labor in Lebanon is most prominent, and programs targeting child labor remained insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem.



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

Children in Lebanon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in construction and in forced labor in agriculture, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1-2) Children also engage in child labor in the production of potatoes and tobacco. (3,4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Lebanon. Data on key indicators on children's work and education 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 (%)		Unavailable

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (5)  
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2021. (6)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

**Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including the production of potatoes, olives, beans, figs, grapes, eggplants, and cannabis (2-4,7-14)
	Production of tobacco† (14-16)
	Fishing, activities unknown (7)
Industry	Construction,† including carpentry, tiling, and welding† (2-4,7,8,11,15,17)
	Working in cement factories† (17,18)
	Making handicrafts (19,20)
	Working in aluminum factories (8,21)
	Working in textile factories (22,23)
Services	Street work,† including begging, street vending, portering, washing cars, scavenging garbage,† and shining shoes (2,4,7,8,11,24-27)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Maintenance and repair of motor vehicles,† and painting† (8,11,19,23,25)
	Domestic work† (7,8,11,19,28)
	Cleaning sewage† and collecting waste materials, including scrap metal (11,19)
	Food service,† including working as waiters (3,8,16)
	Working in slaughterhouses† and butcheries (19)
	Working in small shops (3,7,15,16,19,25)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and arms dealing (4,25)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,13,24,25)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,19,23,29,30)
	Forced labor in agriculture, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1-4,11,19)

† 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.

Multiple crises have converged on Lebanon that have increased the rate of child labor, including a national economic crisis that began in 2019 and continued to worsen throughout the reporting period, the prolonged presence of Syrian refugees, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created new barriers to education and accelerated economic decline. (7,12,20,31) Lebanon has experienced protracted economic and political crises since anti-government protests began in 2019. Shortly after the Port of Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020, the Lebanese Government resigned and a caretaker government was still in place at the end of the reporting period. (7) The limited powers of the caretaker government restricted the government’s ability to respond to the multiple crises it faced as more than half the country fell below the poverty line. (7) UNICEF reported that the rate of child labor increased from 2.6 percent to 4.4 percent during the reporting period, with agriculture and street work making up most of the increase. (7,32)

UNHCR estimates that there were 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2020 and 88 percent of them are living below the extreme poverty line, making Syrian refugee children vulnerable to exploitation. (33) Child labor is also prevalent in other refugee communities in Lebanon, including the Palestinian and Iraqi communities. (20,34) Syrian refugee children are subjected to forced labor in agriculture. (1-3,19) Some Syrian refugee children and their families in the Bekaa Valley are kept in bonded labor in agriculture to pay for makeshift dwellings provided by landowners. (1,12,35,36) An estimated 75 percent of Syrian refugee children working in the Bekaa Valley do so in agriculture. (37) Adult Syrian refugees face legal restrictions that allow them to work only in agriculture, construction, and sanitation. (19,38) These restrictions on adults make children vulnerable to child labor. (11,39)

Children in Lebanon, particularly Syrian refugee children, face barriers to accessing education, including the cost of transportation and supplies, fear of passing checkpoints or of violence, lack of private sanitation facilities for girls, discrimination, bullying, corporal punishment, and a different curriculum in Lebanon than in their country of origin. (3,4,7,15,16,40) In 2020, the government continued its policy of admitting all refugee children regardless of whether they have the required documentation for school enrollment. (7) However, the public school system in Lebanon lacks the capacity to accommodate the large number of school-age Syrian refugee children. (20) Despite the official policy of schools being open to all, in practice, some refugees have been denied access to schools. (4) Moreover, students without documentation are only eligible to receive a certificate, rather than a diploma, causing some undocumented students to drop out. (4) Before the pandemic, more than 50 percent of Syrian refugee children and 35 percent of Palestinian refugee children were not enrolled in formal education. (25,41,42) Children with disabilities, particularly refugee children, were unable to attend school due to insufficient accessibility or inadequacy of facilities, lack of specialized facilities, or unavailability of tailored services for children with disabilities. (40,43) In addition, the economic crisis has precipitated a movement of Lebanese children from private schools to public schools, putting further strain on an overburdened system. (7) Lebanese




and refugee children who work in agriculture often do not attend school during harvesting and planting seasons. (44) One local organization observed a direct correlation between school dropout rates and an increase in child labor. (25)

On March 2, 2020, the government suspended the 2019–2020 academic year due to the pandemic, interrupting the education of more than 1 million children, including 200,000 Syrian refugees. (7) In October and November, schools resumed functioning using a hybrid online and in-class strategy. However, the lack of electricity and Internet continued to prevent some children from accessing remote learning. (7) According to UNICEF, only 35 percent of school-age children had some access to remote learning, and insufficient Internet speeds still prevented one-third of those students from continuing their education remotely. (7,32)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Lebanon has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Lebanon’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of debt bondage.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 22 of the Labor Code (45)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of Decree No. 8987 (46)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Annex 1 of Decree No. 8987 (19,46)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Article 8 of Decree No. 3855; Article 569 of the Penal Code (47,48)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 586.1 and 586.5 of the Penal Code (48)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 506, 523, 525–527, 586.1, and 586.5 of the Penal Code; Decree No. 8987(46,48)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 586.1, 586.5, and 618 of the Penal Code; Article 13 of the Law on Drugs (48,49)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 30 of the National Defense Law (50)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 586.1 of the Penal Code; Annex I of Decree No. 8987 (46,48)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Article 49 of the Education Law (51)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 49 of the Education Law (51)

\* No conscription (52)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (34)

The Labor Code only applies to workers who perform work in industrial, trading, or agricultural enterprises and excludes domestic work and non-industrial, non-trade agriculture. (45) This does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age for work.

In Lebanon, basic education is compulsory. (51) Children generally complete basic education at age 15. (34) 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.

Laws related to forced labor are insufficient because there is no legislative provision that provides criminal penalties for the exaction of forced labor, and debt bondage is not criminally prohibited. (48,53)

The law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as the use of children in the production of pornography is not criminally prohibited. (46,48)

### 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 Labor	Enforces child labor laws through desk review and workplace inspections. Acts as government focal point for child labor issues. (4) The Ministry's Child Labor Unit raises public awareness about child labor and the right to education. Receives complaints of child labor violations on its Child Labor Unit hotline. (4)
Internal Security Forces	Enforces laws regarding child labor through the Anti-Human Trafficking and Morals Protection Bureau. (4)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes violations of the Penal Code in coordination with the Internal Security Forces. Maintains general data and statistics on criminal violations involving child labor. (4) Refers at-risk children to shelters and protection services. Coordinates, through signed agreements, with civil society organizations to provide social workers who oversee court proceedings involving juveniles and deliver services to them, including children engaged in begging. (4)
Directorate of General Security	Focuses on immigration and border protection. Works with the farmers' union to address child labor in agriculture. (4)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Lebanon took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the authority to assess penalties.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Number of Labor Inspectors	34 (4)	34 (54)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (55)	No (55)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (4)	Yes (7)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (55)	Yes (55)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (7)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (4)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (7)

In 2020, virtually all labor inspections conducted were the result of complaints, which are received through an MOL-operated hotline or the Child Labor Unit webpage. (7) In addition, government officials in the past have expressed frustration that they can only conduct inspections in formal places of employment, in which child labor is nearly non-existent. (4,19,20,56) Government officials indicate that funding is insufficient to properly carry out their duties. However, the MOL reported that a car has been provided for inspectors by the ministry. (54) Research was unable to determine whether this was sufficient to meet inspectors' transportation needs.

Lebanon's public sector hiring freeze, instituted in 2019, remained in effect throughout the reporting period, preventing the MOL from hiring additional inspectors. (54) The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Lebanon's workforce, which includes more than 2.1 million workers. (4,57) According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Lebanon would employ about 144 labor inspectors. (58,59)

According to local observers, the MOL's hotline is not fully functional and works for a limited number of hours on official workdays. It does not have a system to register incoming calls. (25)

The government does not publicly release information on its labor law enforcement efforts. (19)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Lebanon 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 the allocation of financial resources.

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (4)	Yes (7)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (4)	Yes (7)
Number of Investigations	10 (4)	98 (7)
Number of Violations Found	8 (4)	98 (7)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	7 (4)	Unknown (7)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (4)	1 (7)

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (4)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (7)

In 2020, routine training courses were cancelled due to the pandemic. Nonetheless, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) reported conducting two training sessions, one for social violence and child labor and a separate training for junior officers who will be in charge of judicial investigations in regional units. (7)

During the reporting period, the ISF investigated 98 potential trafficking cases involving children. (7) The ISF reported that a man was sentenced to 3 years in prison and fined for attempting to sell his minor son. (7)

Despite these efforts, the ISF's anti-trafficking unit is reportedly underfunded and understaffed, and it has no field offices outside Beirut. (2) The Ministry of Justice has stated that a lack of sufficient human resources hindered the government's ability to address child labor. (20)

## 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 Steering Committee on Child Labor	Raises awareness; coordinates efforts among government agencies; establishes standard practices; develops, enforces, and recommends changes; and ensures that government agencies comply with the law. Led by the Minister of Labor, includes representatives from six other ministries and other institutions and international organizations. (20) Sources indicate that the National Steering Committee on Child Labor has not met since 2018. (7)
National Steering Committee on Trafficking in Persons	Coordinates efforts against human trafficking, including child trafficking. Based at the Ministry of Labor and meets on a monthly basis. (20) Active in 2020. (2)
UNICEF and UNHCR	Coordinate efforts to address the needs of children affected by the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. UN representatives identify crucial concerns, including factors that make children vulnerable to child labor. (20) Make recommendations to the government on the use of resources, including referral services. (20) UN agencies and international and local NGOs coordinate child protection efforts through Child Protection Working Groups. (19) Active in 2020. (60,61)

## 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 Action Plan to End Street Begging by Children	Seeks to end child begging by ensuring legal protection for street children, building capacity to protect street children, rehabilitating and reintegrating street children, and conducting outreach regarding the problem. (4) Research was unable to determine whether any steps were taken to implement this action plan during the reporting period.
Policy for the Protection of Students in the School Environment	Protects children's right to education and promotes non-violence in schools by establishing mechanisms to receive complaints of violence, mistreatment, and bullying; and addresses those cases while safeguarding children's privacy. Trains school staff and officials on identifying risk factors. (62,63) Research was unable to determine whether any steps were taken to implement this work plan during the reporting period.
Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon	Provides the policy framework for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict. (64) Research was unable to determine whether any steps were taken to implement this work plan during the reporting period.

The National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor expired in 2019, and the government did not renew or extend it.

### 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 of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

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

Program	Description
Child Protection Program	Joint program by UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Addresses child labor through interventions, including a non-formal education program for children, child protection services, skills development, and social assistance. (4) In 2020, UNICEF estimated that approximately 1,785 children were provided with assistance and case management support. In addition, 6,025 children engaged in child labor received education, social, or child protection assistance. (66)
Reaching All Children with Education (RACE II) (2017–2021)	Donor-funded, 5 year project, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and partners to ensure quality educational opportunities for children ages 3 to 18, regardless of nationality, through holistic interventions that address the demand and availability of quality public education, including non-formal education. (67) Active in 2020. (68)
National Poverty Alleviation Program†	Funded by the government and foreign donors, this program housed at the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Social Affairs provides WFP food vouchers (\$27 per month) for each member of poor families. It also provides school tuition and book costs for secondary school students from 43,000 poor families. (43) Active in 2020. (69)

† Program is funded by the Government of Lebanon.

Although Lebanon has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, including in construction and forced child labor in agriculture. Moreover, a perceived lack of social services makes some officials reluctant to remove children trafficked by their families. (13)

### 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 Lebanon (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict, which the government signed in 2002.	2013 – 2020
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including informal workers, domestic workers, and all agricultural workers.	2019 – 2020
	Ensure that the use of a child in commercial sexual exploitation is criminally prohibited.	2019 – 2020
	Ensure that forced labor and debt bondage are criminally prohibited.	2015 – 2020
Enforcement	Ensure that there is an adequate mechanism to receive and log child labor complaints and refer them for investigation.	2017 – 2020
	Track and publish information on labor law enforcement.	2009 – 2020
	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties.	2015 – 2020
	Provide Ministry of Labor inspectors with proper funding and the necessary transportation.	2011 – 2020
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2016 – 2020
	Publish information on criminal enforcement of child labor laws, including the number of prosecutions initiated.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies, including the Internal Security Forces' anti-trafficking unit, have the necessary funding and staff to investigate and prosecute criminal cases of child labor in accordance with the law.	2017 – 2020

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Ensure that the National Steering Committee on Child Labor meets and carries out its duties.	2019 – 2020
Government Policies	Ensure that the Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon is implemented, and that children previously associated with armed conflict receive social and rehabilitation services.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure that government policies on child labor are implemented.	2020
	Adopt a new action plan to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2020
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2020
	Ensure access to public education for all children, including refugees, by improving transportation, addressing bullying and harassment, accommodating students with disabilities, and improving facilities.	2010 – 2020
	Expand programs, including social services for human trafficking victims, to fully address the extent of child labor, including in construction and forced labor in agriculture.	2013 – 2020

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