

In 2020, Liberia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the labor inspectorate conducted 1,200 inspections at worksites in 2020, including over 100 unannounced labor inspections, compared to an estimated 236 inspections in 2019. In addition, the government investigated two suspected cases of child trafficking, initiated or advanced the prosecution of three cases, and convicted one individual who awaits sentencing. However, children in Liberia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of rubber and the mining of gold and diamonds. In addition, Liberia has yet to accede to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Protocol on Armed Conflict and the Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography, and the minimum age for work is not in compliance with international standards. Moreover, social programs are not sufficient to address the scope of the problem in the country.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Liberia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1,2) Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of rubber and the mining of gold and diamonds. (3,4) Table I provides key indicators on children's work and education in Liberia.

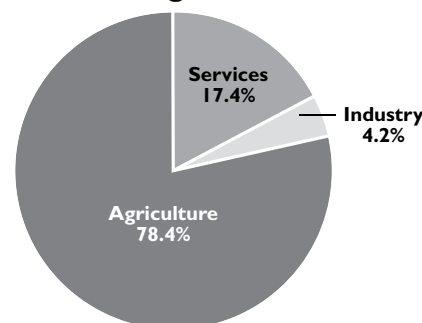
Table I. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	16.6 (136,340)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	75.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	14.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		60.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Labour Force Survey (LFS), 2010. (6)

Figure I. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



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

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of rubber, including cutting trees with machetes and using acid (1-4,7)
	Production of charcoal (3,4)
	Farming activities, including production of cocoa, coffee, cassava, and sugarcane (4)
Industry	Mining diamonds and gold, including washing gravel and using mercury and cyanide (1,2,4,8,9)
	Cutting and crushing stone (3,4,7,10)
	Construction, including carrying heavy loads† (3,4,7)
Services	Domestic work (4,7)
	Street work, including vending, begging, hawking goods, and carrying heavy loads (4,7,11-13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (4,14)
	Forced labor in domestic work, street vending, mining, begging, and work on small rubber plantations, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,4,9)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,4,15)

† 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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The National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL) did not collect any data on child labor in 2020 and the data collected in 2016–17 for an updated labor force survey has not yet been released by the Ministry of Labor (MOL). (4) While the government has yet to collect comprehensive data on child labor activities to inform policies and social programs, there are reports that children in rural communities engage in rubber tapping and coal burning activities, while children in cities and surrounding urban communities crush rocks, engage in domestic work, and sell goods. There are also reports that some children are subjected to hazardous labor in the artisanal mining of gold and alluvial diamonds with tasks that include washing gravel, processing ore, and working in mining shafts. (4,10) Children are also used to sell illicit drugs within the country by adults as a cover to evade arrest by law enforcement. (4) Traffickers generally operate independently and are often family members or respected members of the community who promise poor rural relatives and neighbors better economic or educational opportunities for themselves (in the case of young women) or their children but instead subject them to domestic servitude, forced begging, forced labor, street vending and sex trafficking. Children are also transported from Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone for work. (1,28)




In addition, there are reports that children residing at various orphanages within the capital of Monrovia and in other parts of the country are vulnerable to sexual exploitation due to a lack of basic necessities at the orphanages, including food. (4)

Section 9 of the Children's Law mandates free basic education from grades one to nine, but the cost of uniforms, transportation, books, and school supplies limits access to education for some children. In addition, family members often require children to work long hours, denying them the ability to attend school, even if they could eventually afford to do so. (4) For secondary school students (grades 10–12), reports indicate there is a shortage of teachers, insufficient learning materials, a lack of educational facilities, and inadequate transportation, all of which limit access to education. (4,7) In addition, some teachers sexually exploit students in exchange for the promise of good grades, resulting in children avoiding or dropping out of school. (4,7) Research also indicates the ongoing practice of temporarily removing boys and girls from formal schooling to participate in initiation rituals that transition a child into adulthood. Many children may not return to school after their participation in these initiation ceremonies, making them more vulnerable to child labor. (4,7)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Liberia has ratified some 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 Liberia's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the 1 year break between the compulsory education age and the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Section 74 of the Labor Law; Article 21.2 of the Decent Work Act (17,18)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 7, Section 9.1 of the Children's Law (19)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 21.4 of the Decent Work Act (18)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 2.2 of the Decent Work Act; Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law; Article 12 of the Constitution; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (18-21)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (19,21)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Article 3, Section 21 of the Children's Law; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (18,19,21)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Chapter 16 of the Penal Code (18,22)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (19)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (19)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (19)
Compulsory Education Age	No	14	Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law; Chapter 4 of the Education Reform Act (19,23)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law (19)

* No conscription (24)

The minimum age for work is not in compliance with international standards because it allows children younger than age 16 to engage in work as long as it is outside of school hours, the employer keeps records of the child's schooling, and the child is literate and attends school regularly. Because of this, children of any age may be vulnerable to child labor. Although the Decent Work Act prohibits children younger than age 15 from working full time, it does not prevent children below this age from engaging in part-time employment. (17,19,23) An updated version of the hazardous work list continues to be in draft form and has not yet been endorsed by the Ministry of Labor. (4,18)

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 (MOL)	Conducts worksite inspections and addresses child labor violations. (4)
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP)	Acts as the lead advisory agency on policy formulation, coordination, and monitoring of child protection through its Children Protection and Development Division. Monitors the government's efforts on compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the UN CRC, and the African Union protocols on women and children. (7,25,26)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (Cont.)

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Promotes and executes the rule of law for public safety, including the prosecution of child labor perpetrators. (9)
Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS)	Investigates child endangerment cases and human trafficking in cooperation with the Liberian National Police (LNP) Anti-Trafficking Unit and the Liberia Immigration Service. (4)

During the reporting period, 45 children were removed from situations of exploitation or endangerment and referred to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection for social services or placed in protective shelters. It is unknown how many children were removed specifically from child labor situations. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (26)	Unknown (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	51 (26)	49 (4)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (26)	No (4)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (26)	Yes (4)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (26)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (26)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	236 (26)	1200 (4)
Number Conducted at Worksite	236 (26)	1200 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (26)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (26)	N/A (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (26)	N/A (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (26)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (26)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (18)	Yes (18)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (26)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (26)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (26)	No (4)

The labor inspectorate reported conducting 1,200 inspections at work sites in 2020, including over 100 unannounced labor inspections, compared to an estimated 236 inspections in 2019. This marks a sharp increase in labor inspections, despite the pandemic, due to improved recordkeeping efforts by the government. (4)

Generally, labor inspections are conducted only in the formal sector and not in the informal sector in which children are more likely to be engaged in child labor. Inspectors are not legally able to inspect private farms or homes for underage child domestic labor. (3,4) In addition, the lack of funding and logistical support results in the underutilization of the labor inspectorate's complaint mechanism. (7,28) Although inspectors cannot assess penalties, they can impose corrective measures, such as issuing notices of compliance and filing a complaint with the hearing board. (4,7) However, the lack of penalty assessment authorization, limited funding, and insufficient fines, combined with poor opportunities for revenue generation in the informal sector, hamper the labor inspectorate's enforcement of child labor laws. (3,7,19,28)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Liberia took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including financial resource allocation.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (26)	Yes (4)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (26)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (26)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (26)	2 (4)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (26)	Unknown (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	2 (26)	3 (4)
Number of Convictions	1 (26)	1 (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (26)	Unknown (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (26)	Yes (4)

Although MOL maintains a trafficking-in-persons hotline that can receive calls related to child labor, very few child labor calls come in. (4)

During the reporting period, the government investigated two suspected cases of child trafficking and initiated the prosecution of one case. The courts did not convict any traffickers. (4) In July 2020, the Ministry of Justice's Trans-National Crime Unit raided the offices of an employment agency and arrested two individual allegedly involved in the human trafficking of multiple victims, including teenage boys, to Liberia from neighboring countries under the guise of employment. Some of these victims were forced to engage in street hawking. (4)

Despite these efforts, research indicates the LNP's Women and Children Protection Section had limited training, financial, and physical resources, which hampered its ability to carry out investigations and other enforcement duties. (28) In addition, child labor is typically addressed as an issue of child endangerment, thereby causing a lack of reliable data on violations of child labor laws. (3)

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 a lack of financial support.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL)	Coordinates government and civil society activities concerning child labor. Led by MOL and comprising representatives from 16 organizations, including international and civil society organizations. (29) Assists in coordinating child labor investigations. (30) Seeks to reform national child labor laws and create a national child labor database, which would assist surveys on the extent of child labor issues in Liberia. (29) NACOMAL celebrated the World Day against Child Labor on June 12 through media engagement and chaired one meeting of the National Steering Committee on Child Labor. (4)
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Implements child labor policies. Chaired by NACOMAL and comprising government officials and workers' organizations. Includes four subcommittees on resource mobilization, advocacy, training and legal development, and monitoring and evaluation. (26) The committee met only once in 2020 due to pandemic-related restrictions. (4)
Child Protection Network	Coordinates child protection efforts, including child labor and human trafficking, and refers child victims of abuse to social services providers with support from international and national organizations. Chaired by the MOGCSP, and comprising MOL, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the LNP's WACPS, civil society organizations, and several NGOs. (26) The Child Protection Network met consistently throughout the year, though research was unable to determine if actions were taken to combat child labor as a direct result of these meetings. (4)

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force	Coordinates anti-trafficking activities. Chaired by MOL, comprising representatives from the Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization; LNP; MOJ; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Internal Affairs; and civil society organizations. (7) The Task Force met approximately once a month, sometimes virtually, to share interagency information related to human trafficking cases. These meetings helped promote coordination between investigating authorities and service providers in at least three suspected cases of human trafficking. (4)

The National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL) reported insufficient funding to pursue their mandates. (4)

The government has a draft referral mechanism for child labor, but due to resource, capacity, and coordination constraints, cases were mostly handled outside the formal pathways and in an ad hoc manner. (4)

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 a lack of implementation.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor	Aims to reduce child labor and the worst forms of child labor by 50 percent by 2030 through three strategic objectives, including increasing public awareness on the causes and consequences of the worst forms of child labor; strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks to reduce child labor; and increasing social services and protection for children of vulnerable households. (31) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Action Plan on the Elimination of Child Labor during the reporting period.
National Action Plan for Trafficking in Persons (2019–2024)	Outlines the government's anti-trafficking efforts, including those for child victims, and creates benchmark goals related to trafficking in persons. (9,32) Establishes roles and responsibilities for coordinating government assistance to human trafficking victims and provides shelter and care to children who may have been human trafficking victims. (32) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Action Plan for Trafficking in Persons during the reporting period.
National Child Welfare and Protection Policy	Focuses on the implementation and enforcement of existing child protection laws. (7) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Child Welfare and Protection Policy during the reporting period.
National Social Welfare Policy	Prioritizes the development of action plans and policies that target children subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking. (33) Research could not determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Social Welfare Policy during the reporting period.

Child labor elimination and prevention strategies are not included in the Revised National Youth Policy, the Education Sector Plan, the Rubber Industry Master Plan, or the National Employment Policy. (23,34–40)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including insufficient funding.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Anti-Trafficking Awareness Campaign†	Aims to raise public awareness of human trafficking through the use of radio and billboard messages. (4) With significant international support, Liberian security institutions conducted events around World Day against Trafficking in Persons (TIP, which included training security officials on TIP. (4)
Liberia Social Safety Nets Project (2017–2021)	During the reporting period, the Social Cash Transfer program was delayed in sending funds to 3,500 beneficiary households due to the pandemic. However, the project is on track to make the mobile money transfer to these beneficiaries in January 2021. (41) The government also included a temporary urban cash transfer program (SCT-COVID) given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable households in urban areas. (41) Under this new component, 15,000 households in selected poor communities of Greater Monrovia will be given a two-time cash transfer via mobile money. (41) Lastly, the Social Registry data collection commenced in early December 2020, which will help establish key national safety net delivery systems and provide support for low-income households. (26,41,42)
Shelters‡	MOGCSF-operated shelters for vulnerable street children in Lofa and Nimba County. (7,26) During the reporting period, the program provided shelter for approximately 35 children who are victims of abuse along with an additional 15 victims of gender-based violence. In addition, the government established a shelter for victims of human trafficking and child labor with capacity to accommodate at least eight victims at a time, with five additional mattresses on standby. (43) The Government of Liberia also made financial resources available for the establishment and management of a new shelter for victims of child labor and human trafficking and agreed to provide nighttime safety security for the shelters. (4)
Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor II (CLEAR II)	USDOL-funded project implemented by Winrock International and partners Verité and Lawyers Without Borders to build the capacity of the government to address child labor. During the reporting period, MOL participated in trainings that helped developed guidelines for child labor monitoring systems. (3,44) Additional information is available on the USDOL website .
U.S. Government-Funded Projects	Projects that aim to improve access to education and improve child protection. Includes Accelerated Quality Education for Liberian Children and the McGovern-Dole International Food For Education and Child Nutrition Program, implemented by USDA. (26,45,46) In addition, International Development Law Organization (IDLO), with funding from the USDOS Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, built the capacity of 63 law enforcement officers (Females: 17; Males: 46) from the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency, Liberia Immigration Service, LNP, and MOL on trafficking in persons prevention and response. (4)

† Program is funded by the Government of Liberia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (47-53)

Research was unable to determine if data from the 2017 labor force survey, which reportedly includes a child labor component, were analyzed in 2020. (7,9,26,28) Although the government funds social programs, they are not sufficient to address all sectors in which child labor occurs, including in domestic work, the production of rubber, and the mining of gold and diamonds. (26)

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 Liberia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the compulsory education age to be consistent with the minimum age for employment.	2016 – 2020
	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive and include sectors in which child labor is known to occur; and there are hazards including the production of rubber, mining of diamonds and gold, and construction, including carrying heavy loads.	2020
	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2013 – 2020
	Accede to the UN Protocol on Minimum Age.	2020
Enforcement	Ensure that penalties for employing children under the minimum age for work are stringent enough to deter violations.	2014 – 2020
	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those who are employed less than full time and those who are working outside of school hours.	2016 – 2020

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Publish information on the labor inspectorate's funding and the number of child labor violations found.	2016 – 2020
	Ensure labor inspections are conducted in all sectors in which children work.	2016 – 2020
	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties for child labor violations.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate's complaint and referral mechanism is adequately supported and operational.	2017 – 2020
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement related to the worst forms of child labor, including the violations found and the penalties applied.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure adequate funding for child labor enforcement agencies, such as the Ministry of Labor, the Liberia National Police, and the Women and Children Protection Section, and provide necessary training for such officials to enforce child labor laws.	2010 – 2020
	Disaggregate the child endangerment cases prosecuted through the Ministry of Justice to determine the number of cases related to the worst forms of child labor.	2016 – 2020
Coordination	Ensure adequate funding for the National Commission on Child Labor's program activities to address child labor.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure that coordinating bodies, including the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, are implementing effective case referral mechanisms.	2019 – 2020
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into relevant policies.	2010 – 2020
	Publish information about the activities taken to implement policies that address child labor.	2017 – 2020
Social Programs	Collect and publish comprehensive research data to determine child labor activities and to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2020
	Improve access to education by subsidizing the cost of school-related costs and reduce barriers to education by building additional schools, addressing sexual abuse in schools, and providing adequate transportation.	2012 – 2020
	Ensure that children do not leave school before the completion of compulsory education.	2017 – 2020
	Expand existing social programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, especially in forced domestic work, the production of rubber, prostitution, and the mining of gold and diamonds.	2009 – 2020

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