

In 2020, Suriname made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government drafted and approved a new National Action Plan for the Prevention and Response to Trafficking in Persons. It also hired 20 new labor inspectors, increasing the size of the Labor Inspectorate from 50 to 70. However, children in Suriname are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. Prohibitions related to the use of children for illicit activities do not meet international standards. In addition, the compulsory education age does not reach the minimum age for employment, leaving some children vulnerable to labor exploitation. Suriname also lacked targeted inspections in risk-prone sectors.



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

Children in Suriname are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. (1-4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Suriname. 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	7.2 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	7.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		85.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018. (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	Harvesting crops, applying pesticides,† carrying heavy loads‡ (2-4) Fishing, hunting, and forestry (7,8)
Industry	Mining, particularly gold mining (1-4,7) Construction,† including carrying heavy loads‡ (2-4,8) Wood processing, including carrying heavy loads‡ (2,3)
Services	Street work, including vending (2,8) Domestic work (7,8)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,4,7,9)

† 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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Throughout the coastal areas of Suriname, children work in agriculture, and in the capital of Paramaribo, they primarily engage in street vending. In addition, children, mostly boys, work carrying heavy loads in small-scale gold mines in the southeast region of the country, where they risk exposure to mercury and cyanide, excessive noise, extreme heat, and collapsing sand walls. (1-3,10,11) Children have also been reported working in small-scale construction and wood processing companies outside Paramaribo. (2,3) Moreover, children are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, including in informal mining camps in Suriname's remote interior. (3,4,7,10,11)

Although Suriname's net attendance percentage for primary school is 95 percent, it is only 53 percent for secondary school, and research indicates that secondary school attendance in the interior is as low as 21 percent. Children from low-income households, particularly in the interior, face difficulties accessing education due to long distances to schools, transportation costs, and school fees. (1,2,12,13) There were reports that some children were denied access to schools due to incomplete documentation. (3) The COVID-19 pandemic has made access to education more complicated for low-income families. Limitations to in-person school access have forced students into partial home schooling when schools are open and into full home schooling under more restrictive lockdown measures. (3)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Suriname 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 Suriname's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the compulsory education age, which is below the minimum age for work.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Articles 1 (j-l), 3, and 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act; Article 17 of the Labor Code (14,15)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 1 (k-l) and 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act; Article 1 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth (15,16)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 2-3 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth; Article 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act (15,16)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 15 of the Constitution; Article 334 of the Penal Code (17,18)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 307 and 334 of the Penal Code (18)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 293, 303, and 306 of the Penal Code (18)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 9 of the Conscription Act (19)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	12	Article 39 of the Constitution; Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education (17,20)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 38–39 of the Constitution (17)

\* No conscription (21)

Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education requires children to attend school until they are at least age 12. (20) This leaves children between ages 12 and 16 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are no longer required to attend school but are not yet legally permitted to work.

The Constitution guarantees free public education for all citizens, and the September 2014 amendment to the Citizenship and Residency Law granted citizenship to children born in Suriname of foreign-born parents. Sources indicate, however, that a small number of children born in Suriname to foreign parents before September 2014 remain ineligible to receive citizenship but do receive free public education if they provide a birth certificate and vaccination records. (1,17,22,23)

The Penal Code establishes penalties for the production and trafficking of drugs, but it does not appear to specifically prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child in the production and trafficking of drugs. (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 authority 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 laws related to child labor. (11) Reports suspected forced labor cases, including the worst forms of child labor, within 45 minutes of identification, to the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force. (2)
Suriname Police Force	Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. (11) Includes the Youth Affairs Police, who cover law enforcement involving children under age 18 and are jointly responsible for child labor-related crimes. Also includes the Trafficking in Persons Unit, which investigates reports and allegations of human trafficking and forced sexual exploitation nationwide, including cases involving children. (2,3,9)
Prosecutor's Office	Investigates and prosecutes human trafficking cases, and enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (2)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Suriname took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including targeted inspections in risk-prone sectors.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown
Number of Labor Inspectors	50 (2)	70 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (2)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (2)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	834 (2)	400 (3)
Number Conducted at Worksite	0 (2)	400‡ (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	3 (2)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	2 (2)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (2)	2 (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (3)

‡ Data are from August 2020 to December 2020. Data from January 2020 to July 2020 is unknown.

In 2020, as part of a reorganization of the labor inspectorate, a new head was appointed and 20 new inspectors were hired. (3) During the reporting period, as part of the government's efforts to implement the established pandemic protocols for various sectors, the Labor Inspectorate was placed at the head of a pandemic Cluster Team that increased inspections of businesses in different sectors. The pandemic Cluster Team is an inter-ministerial team with representatives of the Ministries of Labor, Health, Justice and Police, Regional Development and Sport, and Defense. (3) This change provided the Labor Inspectorate with the capacity to increase its general inspections for labor law violations as well. (3)

Although the exact number of inspections during the first of half of 2020 is unknown, 400 inspections were conducted between August and December, the majority of which were part of the government's effort to monitor adherence to the pandemic protocols for different sectors of the economy. (3) Labor inspections are mainly conducted near coastal areas. The Ministry of Labor noted that there is an insufficient number of labor inspectors to ensure the enforcement of labor laws in the informal sector, particularly in mining and agricultural areas, fisheries, and the country's interior. (1, 11, 21, 24) However, all labor inspectors are trained and authorized to enforce child labor laws. (2, 3, 10) In 2020, all inspectors took part in a presentation on the Children and Young Persons Labor Act presented by the legal team of the Ministry of Labor. Members of the Labor Inspectorate also took part in virtual training sessions on human trafficking hosted by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons of the USDOS in collaboration with the USDOJ. (3)

Although the Ministry of Labor does not provide disaggregated funding information, the Labor Inspectorate reported that its funding is insufficient to adequately cover all sectors in the country, including the formal and informal sectors. In addition, high-risk sectors are not specifically targeted because labor inspectors mainly conduct routine inspections in the formal sectors, which have lower incidences of child labor. (3, 10)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Suriname 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 allocation of 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	Yes (2)	No (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (2)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	2 (25)	0 (3)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown	0 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0	0 (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	0 (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	No (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (3)

Suriname's referral system, managed by the Bureau for the Rights of the Child of the Ministry of Social Affairs, was developed in collaboration with UNICEF in 2019 and is still in pilot phase. (3) The referral mechanism aims to address violations of children's rights by not only working toward the removal of children from exploitative situations, but also by seeking solutions to the root causes of their exploitation. (2,3)

The number of investigators is insufficient to respond to human trafficking cases, and, according to the Prosecutor's Office, investigations are initiated primarily as a result of complaints filed and are limited by a lack of resources, especially for travel to the interior of the country, which was only made worse by the pandemic. (3, 11, 24, 26) Suriname has a mechanism for the referral of victims for social services. In addition, the Bureau for Victim Services within the Ministry of Justice and Police provides counseling, the Bureau for Legal Services can provide a victim with legal assistance, and other services are arranged by the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the police. (3)

#### 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
National Commission on Combating Child Labor	Serves as the leading body in drafting child labor policies. (10) Coordinates and monitors efforts to combat child labor, including the execution of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. Also coordinates with the Integrated Child Protection Network to maximize awareness-raising efforts. (2) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Commission on Combating Child Labor was unable to execute its planned activities from the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor, which would have been in-person awareness-raising activities throughout the country. Remained active on social media in 2020, continuously posting information on child labor. (3)
Trafficking in Persons Working Group	Coordinates the government's anti-human trafficking efforts. Provides care to victims of human trafficking through government-supported NGOs. (24) Comprises nine government agencies, including organizations that target the worst forms of child labor. (11) Was temporarily disbanded when a new government took office in July 2020. During the reporting period, drafted an action plan for 2020–2021, which was approved by the Ministry of Justice and Police. (3)
Integrated Child Protection Network	Prevents child abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including child labor. (11) Is led by the Ministry of Social Affairs and includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Police, Office of the First Lady, National Assembly, and NGO stakeholders, with support from UNICEF. (11) In 2020, received post-evaluation recommendations on the National Referral System, which it developed with UNICEF and which is currently in its pilot phase. Held an informational session for members of the National Assembly as well as representatives of different political parties, and launched its website. (3)

#### V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

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**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor (2019–2024)	Aims to combat child labor by removing children from child labor and by addressing issues that lead children to become involved in child labor, including poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Also addresses the social and educational reintegration of these children. (2) In 2020, the commission implementing the plan postponed its planned in-person awareness activities throughout the country, but continued to regularly post information on child labor issues on social media. (3)
National Action Plan for the Prevention and Response to Trafficking in Persons (2020–2021)†	Aims to combat and prevent human trafficking, including through the prevention, protection, and reintegration of victims, and the prosecution of perpetrators of trafficking in persons. (27) In 2020, the plan was updated and approved. Follows the 2019 plan closely in its policies and accompanying actions. (3)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

## 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 services for child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

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

Program	Description
Decent Work Program	ILO program that supports capacity building of the Labor Inspectorate and constituents, as well as of the National Commission for the Elimination of Child Labor for implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of the National Action Plan. Aims to have trained inspectors to cover all areas in Suriname by 2020. (28) Provided in-depth training from ILO to the Labor Inspectorate, though the majority of training scheduled in 2020 was postponed and still needs to be rescheduled. (3,29)
Child and Youth Hotline†	Government-run hotline that provides confidential advice to children in need, including victims of the worst forms of child labor. Receives approximately 80 calls per day. (30) Reported to be active in 2020. (3)
Anti-Trafficking Hotline†	Government-sponsored hotline through which citizens can provide information to the police about human trafficking cases. (2) Reported to be active in 2020. (3)
Second Basic Education Improvement Program (2015–2040)	\$20 million IDB-funded, 25 year loan implemented by the Ministry of Education to develop curriculums and textbooks, provide teacher training, renovate classrooms, build housing for teachers in the interior, and build a center for teacher training and professional development. Aims to benefit 90,000 students and 6,500 teachers. (31) Reported to be active in 2020. (3)
Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor	With support from the Cooperation Agency of Brazil and ILO, assists Caribbean countries, including Suriname, to improve youth transition from school to work. In October 2020, held a virtual conference to discuss plans for 2022–2025, updated its governance mechanisms, and worked to improve ownership and social dialogue. (32)

† Program is funded by the Government of Suriname.

The government continues to support initiatives to eradicate child labor, but existing social programs are inadequate to fully address the problem. In particular, Suriname lacks programs to assist child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as children who work in mining and agriculture. (11, 12, 33)

## 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 Suriname (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2020
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2020
	Increase the compulsory education age to at least age 16, the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that all children, including children of foreign-born parents, have access to free public education.	2015 – 2020

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2020
Enforcement	Publish information on Labor Inspectorate funding.	2012 – 2020
	Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate is sufficiently funded to cover labor inspections in both the formal and informal sectors of the labor force.	2018 – 2020
	Strengthen the Labor Inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on the analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors, such as in fisheries and the interior of the country, particularly in mining and agricultural areas in which child labor is likely to occur.	2015 – 2020
	Increase the number of investigators responding to human trafficking cases, and allocate sufficient funding to ensure that criminal law enforcement officers have the resources necessary to conduct investigations, particularly in the interior of the country and informal mining areas.	2014 – 2020
Social Programs	Develop social programs to prevent and eradicate child labor in agriculture and mining and to improve secondary school attendance, particularly in the interior.	2015 – 2020
	Strengthen social services and shelters to assist child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.	2014 – 2020
	Increase access to education by eliminating school-related fees, reducing transportation costs, increasing access to schools in remote locations, and removing requirements for documentation.	2020

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