

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2021, Cambodia made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government launched its first 5-year National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Online Child Sexual Exploitation (2021–2025). The government also held campaigns and workshops to raise awareness about child labor and gender equity in the freshwater fishing sector. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Cambodia is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because it continued to implement practices that delay advancement to eliminate child labor. The government failed to take active measures to investigate, prosecute, convict, and sentence public officials who participate in or facilitate the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation of children and debt-based forced labor in brick kilns. In addition, judges were reported to have accepted bribes in return for dismissal of charges, acquittal, and reduced sentencing for individuals committing such crimes, especially for those with alleged ties to the government. Children in Cambodia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced labor in brickmaking. In addition, the government did not publicly release information on its criminal law enforcement efforts.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Cambodia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced labor in brickmaking. (1-4) Table I provides key indicators on children's work and education in Cambodia.

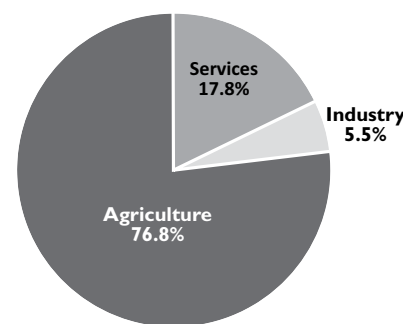
Table I. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	7.5 (243,371)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	87.6
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	6.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		92.0

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Socio-Economic Survey (CSES), 2017. (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	Fishing, including deep-sea† and night fishing† (2,4,7-11)
	Peeling shrimp (10,13)
	Production of palm oil, bananas, tobacco, cassava, rubber, and rice (2,10,11,13-15)
	Growing, cutting, tying, carrying,† and spraying pesticides† on sugarcane (2,10,11,15,16)
	Logging† for the production of timber (9,10,13)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of salt (17)
	Production of bovines (18,19)
Industry	Making bricks,† including feeding clay into brickmaking machines, removing wood fuel from trucks and feeding to brickmaking machines, drying bricks, transporting bricks to the oven,† and loading bricks onto and off of trucks (1,2,7,15)
	Construction,† including operating transportation equipment† (2,7,11,14,15,20)
	Production of textiles, including bleaching,† dyeing,† and finishing with chemicals;† garments; and footwear (7,11,13,15,21,22)
	Production of alcoholic beverages† (7,9,13)
	Work in slaughterhouses† for the production of meat† (7,9)
	Manufacturing of wood and metal† products (7)
Services	Domestic work (2,7,12,14,23)
	Work as security guards† and in entertainment,† including as bartenders,† masseurs,† dancers,† and waiters† (2,4,7,11,15)
	Street work, including car washing, begging, vending, scavenging, collecting garbage, and exploitation by orphanages to fraudulently lure donations from tourists (2,12,14,20,24-26)
	Work as garbage pickers in dumpsites (2,15)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,3,12,14,23,26)
	Forced begging or street vending (9,12,14,15,27)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking (20)
	Forced labor in the production of bricks (1,11,13-15,20,23,28,29)
	Forced labor in fishing (4)

† 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.

In Cambodian brick factories, some children engage in forced labor, sometimes in dangerous conditions, to offset family debt to employers. (2,3,14,23,28,30,31) The rapid growth in the construction industry, particularly in Phnom Penh and Sihanoukville, has increased the demand for bricks and fueled child labor and debt bondage. (11,28,30,32) Failed harvests from droughts have compounded farmers' debts; harvest are sold to brick kiln owners, thus placing farmers' families into hereditary debt bondage until the debts are repaid. (2,11,14,28,30-34) The government's 2019 census of all 486 operational kilns in the country found no instances of child labor or debt bondage. These results contradict findings by independent researchers, which show high rates of child labor and debt bondage at brick kilns. (11,15,23,29,34-38)

Research indicated that some children work on rubber plantations in northeastern Cambodia to help pay off loan debt taken on by their parents, putting them at risk for debt bondage. There is also research indicating that children in domestic work face similar debt bondage conditions. Approximately 30 percent of child domestic workers are under the age of 18. (15)

Although Cambodia conducted a nationwide survey of child labor in 2019—the first such survey since 2012—it has yet to publish the results of this survey or make the data publicly available. (11,13,15,36)

Cambodia is a source and destination country for child trafficking, both transnational and domestic. Some Cambodian children are trafficked transnationally, in particular to other countries in Asia or to countries in the Middle East where traffickers may force them to work on fishing vessels, especially on Thai-owned and -operated fishing vessels, in the agriculture and construction sectors, in factories, in domestic work (often through debt-based coercion), or for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. (3,14,26) However, the COVID-19 pandemic decreased such migration along with all types of cross-border travel. (3,14,26) Children living in Cambodia are also vulnerable to domestic trafficking. Children, girls in particular, are subjected to domestic human trafficking, from rural to urban areas, and internationally, to countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC). (12,14,23,25,26,30) Girls as young as age 14 are "bride trafficked" to

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China for CSEC, and research found that the number of these cases has doubled since 2020. Many of these girls had previously worked in the garment, hospitality, and tourism sectors, which were particularly impacted by the pandemic. (15,26,39)

The largely unregulated growth of casinos, entertainment establishments, and other commercial enterprises owned by the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Preah Sihanouk Province led to an increase of Cambodian girls in forced labor, including sex trafficking, although such activity has decreased since Cambodia banned online gambling in August 2019, leading to an exodus of PRC businesses and citizens. (14,15,23,26,40) In addition, PRC and Southeast Asian nationals as young as age 15 were trafficked into Cambodia to work in online gambling and internet scam operations, particularly in the port town of Sihanoukville; some of these girls are victims of commercial sexual exploitation. (2)

Online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) is reportedly increasing in Cambodia, facilitated by an increase in cheap, high-speed Internet access. (10,11,25,26,41-43) Furthermore, during the reporting period, a survey conducted by NGOs noted a rise in the reported number of OSEC cases after schools closed at the height of the pandemic. With children spending more time online, the survey noted that 15 percent of children reported having been contacted by strangers on social media, and 2 percent reported having been asked to share intimate pictures or videos, or to perform inappropriate acts in front of their webcams. (15,44,45)

Research has found that children who are placed in residential care facilities or orphanages in Cambodia are at a higher risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labor, including child sexual exploitation, and are exposed to conditions that can negatively affect their developmental and health outcomes. (11,14,25,26,46) Many private residential care institutions reportedly exploit children as "sham" orphans to lure donations from foreigners. (11,25,46)

Although the Education Law establishes free basic education, unofficial school-related fees, such as for building maintenance and school uniforms, are prohibitive for some families. (11,15,20,47) Other barriers to education include denied enrollment for children without birth certificates, limited transportation to schools in remote areas and at "floating schools," lack of drinking water, sanitation and toilet facilities in some schools, language barriers, threat of corporal punishment, and an insufficient number of teachers. These barriers particularly affect ethnic minority children, children with disabilities, and children from rural and disadvantaged communities. (9,11,14,15,46,48,49) Furthermore, children may only transfer schools during two designated periods per year, resulting in some children repeating a year of schooling because of the disruption in the school year, which can contribute to dropout rates among children living in temporary settings, including migrant children. (15,49)

While education is free through grade nine, it is not compulsory. (46,47,50) Nearly 13 percent of primary school-age children were not enrolled in school during the reporting year. (2) The lack of compulsory schooling makes children under age 15 particularly vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to be in school but are not yet legally permitted to work. (47,50-52) Most Cambodian children attend school only 4 hours a day, so many children spend the remainder of the day with their parents on or near work-sites. (2) More than 60 percent of children with disabilities are unable to attend school, according to the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization. (2,53) In addition, sanitation conditions are unsafe in Cambodia's 34 "floating schools" in or around fishing communities, and children as young as age 6 often travel to school by boat, many of whom are ethnic Vietnamese and face language barriers. (2) of the country's primary schools, 60 percent are without access to water and more than 25 percent are without access to latrines. (2) Children from indigenous groups in particular face challenges in accessing education, including "incomplete schools" (in which not all grades are supported), the lack of availability of secondary schools, and large geographical distances between homes and schools. (2)




II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Cambodia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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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 Cambodia's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work and prohibiting the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Article 177 of the Labor Law (51)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 173 and 177 of the Labor Law; Regulation on the Prohibition of Hazardous Child Labor; Articles 339 and 340 of the Penal Code (51-55)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 2 of the Regulation on the Prohibition of Hazardous Child Labor (54)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 15 and 16 of the Labor Law; Articles 10, 12, 15–17, and 19 of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation; Article 80 of Law on Juvenile Justice (51,56,57)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 10–20 and 22 of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (56)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 15, 28, 33–37, and 41 of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation; Articles 284, 289, and 346 of the Penal Code (55,56)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 345 of the Penal Code; Articles 3 and 47 of the Law on Control of Drugs (55,58)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 42 of the Law on General Statutes for the Military Personnel of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (59)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		The Law on General Statutes for the Military Personnel of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (59)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No		
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 31 of the Education Law (47)

In October 2021, an amendment to the Labor Law was promulgated. (60) Among the changes included in this amendment is a provision establishing Cambodian labor inspectors as having the status of "judicial police," which gives them the authority to arrest people suspected of labor violations that are also criminal violations. (40)

Although the Labor Code prohibits work by children under age 15, the law does not apply to children outside of formal employment relationships and, therefore, does not conform to international standards that require all children be protected under the law that sets a minimum age for work. (46,54) The Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training's (MOLVT) regulation on household work extends minimum age protections for domestic

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workers to age 18 and provides clear definitions of household work. However, the regulation does not specify legal protections for household workers employed in informal relationships, including when working for their relatives without a contract. (10,46,50,51,61)

Cambodian laws also do not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children, as the use or offering of a child for pornographic performances is not criminally prohibited. (20,55)

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 and Vocational Training (MOLVT)	Head of MOLVT's Child Labor Bureau also serves as the Secretary General of the National Committee on Countering Child Labor (NCCL). (11,15,62) Enforces child-related provisions of the Labor Law, and trains Commune Committees for Women and Children that oversee local child labor monitoring systems. (62) Includes 24 MOLVT inter-departmental inspection teams. (63) Tasked with removing children from child labor, including at brick kilns. (11) Employs 1 child labor inspector in each of Cambodia's 25 provinces. (10,64)
Ministry of the Interior—Cambodian National Police—Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department (AHTJP), Anti-Cybercrime Department, and Department of Criminal Police of General Commissariat	Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Police are commanded by the Ministry of the Interior and report to the AHTJP Department Director. (20,25) Enforce laws against human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), in collaboration with municipal and provincial anti-human trafficking and juvenile protection offices. (20,25) Field complaints from the public about human trafficking, which can be filed through the anti-human trafficking hotline. (38) Oversee the Information and Technology Office, which searches for evidence of trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation of children on the Internet, in printed media, and in other sources. (26,62,63)
Provincial Police Commissariats—Bureaus of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection and Bureaus of Criminal Police	Through their Anti-Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Bureaus, enforce laws against human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children at the provincial level. Coordinates with the AHTJP. (15,38) Through their Criminal Police Bureaus, enforce criminal law at the provincial level. Coordinates with the Department of Criminal Police. (15,38)
Ministry of Defense—Cambodian Royal Armed Forces—Cambodia Royal Gendarmerie (CRG)—Bureau of Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection	Mandated to enforce laws against human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children found within the military. (38)
Ministry of Tourism—Tourism Police Department	Tourism Police Department works to address the sexual exploitation of children in travel and tourism and child trafficking. Disseminates public awareness materials to counter child sexual abuse. (26)

During the reporting year, the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning, and Construction, which oversees construction sites, trained 330 of its inspectors on ensuring safe working conditions using a new checklist; inspections resumed in March 2022. However, the checklist does not include items specific to child labor and the training was not coordinated with MOLVT's labor inspectorate. (2)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Cambodia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of MOLVT that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws, including financial resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (15,65)	Unknown (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	602 (15)	602 (2)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (51)	Yes (51)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (15)	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (15)	No (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (15)	Yes (2)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	1,824(2)	176 (2)
Number Conducted at Worksite	1,309(15)	45 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	4 (15)	0 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	4 (15)	N/A (2)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	4 (15)	N/A (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (15)	Unknown (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (15)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (51)	Yes (51)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (15)	Unknown (40)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (15)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (15)	Yes (2)

During the reporting period, MOLVT conducted 176 inspections, down sharply from 1,824 in 2020 due to the pandemic; it did not specify how many of these were routine inspections and how many were unannounced or “special” inspections.(40) MOLVT indicated it only conducts unannounced labor inspections for cases in which a specific request was made or a serious violation was reported. (2) In October 2021, MOLVT launched a pilot project for online factory self-assessments for all garment, footwear, and travel goods factories, which will serve as background information for in-person inspections that may resume in mid-2022. (2)

The Child Labor Bureau primarily focuses on inspections of brick kilns, and relies on other MOLVT bureaus to alert them to possible child labor issues in other sectors before inspections occur. (40) Staff in MOLVT bureaus are not equipped with the proper technical training or expertise to identify child labor, resulting in staff typically asking very few questions during inspections. (10,11) In an effort to improve labor inspectors' performance, MOLVT requires all national-level labor inspectors take and pass a yearly online examination that aims to assess and improve overall technical skills and legal knowledge in order to continue working as labor inspectors. (11,38) The government has established joint inspection teams composed of officials from MOLVT, the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts, the Ministry of the Environment, and the Ministry of Tourism. These teams are tasked with monitoring adherence to labor laws in the garment, tourism, industrial, handicraft, and entertainment and nightlife sectors. (15,38,66)

The government proactively inspects only two sectors for child labor: the brick kiln industry and the export garment sector. Research indicated that labor inspectors were rarely able to conduct inspections in the construction sector, as owners who were closely affiliated with government officials or powerful tycoons were able to obstruct labor inspectors from accessing their properties. (3,11,15,38,40) MOLVT officials said they had not yet conducted inspections in the entertainment sector, in part because they were not sure if they had sufficient legal authority to do so. (3,65) In the brick kiln industry, authorities often provided brick kiln owners with advance notice of inspections, enabling them to conceal abuses, including child labor violations. In addition, police view brick kiln inspection as the MOLVT's responsibility and said they would only investigate a kiln if the MOLVT asked them to and reported suspected criminal activity, which they have not to date. (14)

The government, the ILO, and NGOs all agree that the labor inspectorate is insufficiently funded and there is an insufficient number of labor inspections. This, in turn, impacts the ability of the labor inspectorate to conduct inspections outside of Phnom Penh and in rural communities due to lack of funding for transportation costs, resulting in most child labor inspections occurring in the city of Phnom Penh and in the provincial, formal-sector factories rather than in rural areas in which a majority of child laborers work. (2,7,10,11,15,46,67) The lack of funding is also one factor preventing the labor inspectorate from conducting inspections in hospitality and nightlife establishments after business hours, because the labor inspectorate is unable to pay

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inspectors for overtime work. (10,15,46) While unannounced inspections are permitted, they rarely happen in practice. (10,11,15,64)

MOLVT has established regulations for children on hazardous work in several sectors, including in agriculture, brickmaking, and fishing. However, malfeasance within MOLVT and law enforcement agencies limits the capacity of local authorities to adequately enforce these regulations, resulting in penalties related to the worst forms of child labor rarely being imposed in accordance with the law. (9-11,15,46,68) Overall, research indicates that the government lacks the capacity to deal with child labor and is overwhelmed by the scale of the issue, particularly in Preah Sihanouk, leading to an increase in the number of child laborers at construction sites and entertainment venues, including casinos, hotels, and karaoke bars. (11,15)

During the reporting period, MOLVT launched two social media “channels” on the app Telegram where the public can submit complaints on child labor violations. This is in addition to the existing “1297” phone hotline, MOLVT’s Facebook page, or calling a labor inspector directly using phone numbers published on MOLVT’s website. (2)

The government did not publish data on the labor inspectorate funding, training for new labor inspectors, and number of routine inspections conducted.

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Cambodia took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Cambodian National Police that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws, including training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Unknown (15)	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (15)	Unknown (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (15)	Unknown (2)
Number of Investigations	21 (38)	Unknown (2)
Number of Violations Found	31 (15)	Unknown (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (15)	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (15)	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (15)	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (15)	Yes (2)

Research found that criminal law enforcement officials continued to fail to take significant actions on credible reports of government officials being complicit in the worst forms of child labor, including at entertainment establishments in which the commercial sexual exploitation of children is known to occur, and at brick kilns whose owners may subject families, including children, to debt-based forced labor. (2,14,23,46,69) In particular, police officers admitted that they sometimes avoid investigating child labor complaints at brick kilns, and instead assist in the capture and jailing of runaway brick kiln workers to avoid potential retaliation by politically connected owners who use their connections to avoid potential investigations and fines. (2,14,28,46,70,71) The government failed to make significant efforts to investigate, prosecute, or convict government officials complicit in the worst forms of child labor. (3,14,23,46,69)

Government officials profited directly from the commercial sexual exploitation of children and indirectly by being permissive of it, especially when undertaken in establishments owned by those with ties to the government. (2,3,14,70,72) Furthermore, research found that owners of entertainment establishments at which child sexual exploitation is known to occur sometimes used their connections to law enforcement officials to avoid investigation, prosecution, and fines. (2,14,23,46,70,72) Research also found instances when raids into these establishments were thwarted by “tip-offs” from working-level police in advance of the raids. (3,14,23)

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To minimize internal leaks, some provincial police chiefs turned cases over to the Anti-Human Trafficking Juvenile Police, which conducted independent raids without notifying the local authorities until moments before they began. (3,14) In 2021, U.S. law enforcement officials referred nine potential cases of online child sexual exploitation to Cambodia's anti-human trafficking and cybercrime specialists, leading to four arrests under Cambodian domestic trafficking laws. (43)

In addition, many law enforcement officials, particularly those located in rural areas, are unaware of how to properly conduct anti-trafficking in persons work, as most have not received training on basic law enforcement techniques. (3,14,23) Furthermore, law enforcement officials investigating suspected human trafficking cases are expected to personally cover all expenses of the investigation, including transportation costs, and are rarely reimbursed in full or on time. This has led to officials reportedly pursuing cases for which costs will be covered on their behalf, and makes some law enforcement units more susceptible to malfeasance. (11,14,23,70)

Research also found that local officials allegedly facilitated cross-border human trafficking by accepting bribes to forge identity documents. (14) Intimidation of human trafficking victims and their families also occurred during the reporting period, perpetuated by a government regulation that bars NGOs from assisting human trafficking victims in seeking formal recognition and obtaining the required identification from the government to receive available victim services. This regulation forces victims and their families to interact directly with criminal law enforcement authorities, resulting in most victims declining to file complaints or obtain the identity documents necessary to receive services. (3,14)

In Cambodia, judges have discretion to determine whether perpetrators of crimes related to child labor will be imprisoned or fined and the amount of the fine. The penalties imposed are not uniformly administered and do not adhere to the parameters prescribed by law. (14,30,46) In some cases, citing resource constraints and pandemic-related shutdowns, not all trafficking in person cases were brought to court despite evidence being supplied by the police. Prosecutors and judges have been known to accept bribes in return for dismissal of charges, acquittal, and reduced sentencing. (3,14,26,70,73) Research also found that law enforcement misused resources at their disposal to detain, prosecute, and convict some individuals for politically motivated reasons or spurious trafficking in person charges. (14) Furthermore, law enforcement generally focused on deterring foreign involvement in CSEC, despite the fact that the local population constituted the main source of demand. (3,14)

Research indicates that the use of "judicial supervision," where defendants are released on their own recognizance in advance of a trial, has resulted in as many as 30 percent of human trafficking suspects not returning to participate in their criminal trials as law enforcement lacks the resources to monitor defendants. This severely limits the ability of law enforcement officials to hold criminals accountable, putting the population at risk. (3,14,23) Due to a lack of resources, including personnel, and a lack of clear guidelines in the criminal procedural code regarding judicial supervision, law enforcement rarely issued arrest warrants for absconded defendants unless NGOs were available to assist in the apprehension of said defendants. (14) In addition, the government has yet to fully implement the "Child Friendly Court" program as instructed by the Ministry of Justice in 2018 that will make it easier for child victims to provide testimony by using video-conferencing technology instead of confronting defendants in person, which can result in re-traumatization. (14,23)

Cambodian law outlines channels for victim restitution, and research indicated an increase in the number of verdicts ordering traffickers to pay some form of financial recompense to victims. However, this restitution was extremely difficult to obtain due to a legal requirement delaying payment until after the completion of the trafficker's jail term; convicted traffickers' frequent abscondment further complicated this arrangement. (3,14,26) Coupled with the government lacking a procedure on how to calculate compensation, victims rarely received the amount promised, and many victims' families settled out of court with traffickers or accepted bribes to drop the relevant charges. (3,14,26)

The government's ability to properly save and store data related to the worst forms of child labor was found to be inadequate, due to outdated data collection storage platforms and a lack of resources, including training,

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equipment, and funding. (3,23,38) The government did not provide information on initial training for new employees, refresher courses, the number of prosecutions initiated, the number of convictions, or the number of penalties imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor for inclusion in this report.

The Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association reported that it had rescued five children from prostitution in Siem Reap Province in 2021. (2) To help address the emergence of OSEC within Cambodia, a local NGO set up an online platform and a hotline for people to report instances of OSEC. (74,75)

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 insufficient inter-ministerial coordination.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Committee on Countering Child Labor (NCCL)	Serves as the primary interagency coordinating body for the government's various ministries on child labor issues. Labor Minister serves as its chair and the head of MOLVT's Child Labor Bureau serves as the Secretary General. (2) No meetings were held during the reporting year due to the pandemic. (2)
Cambodian National Council for Children	Coordinates child labor issues at the national level, including implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of all child rights policies and programs. (9,25,26,38) Ensures that projects and programs follow the National Plan of Action on the Reduction of Child Labor and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (9) Includes concerned ministries, businesses, trade unions, and NGOs. Oversees Provincial Committees on the Protection of Child Rights and Provincial Committees on Child Labor. (9) Coordinates all government ministries, institutions, international NGOs, development partners, and the community in promoting and protecting children's rights. (76) Oversees the National Child Protection Commission that coordinates and collaborates with government, civil society organizations, and NGOs. (77) Oversees the Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OSEC) Committee, which works in collaboration with nearly 20 institutions and ministries to address online abuse and exploitation of children. (15,38) In 2021, in partnership with other government agencies, organized the official launch ceremony for Cambodia's first 5-year Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE Action Plan 2021–2025). (43,78)
Commune Committees for Women and Children	Advisory entities that raise awareness of child labor regulations, promote school attendance, collaborate with provincial labor departments to monitor for child labor violations, and refer children at risk of or engaged in child labor to social protection services at the local level. Led by the Ministry of Interior's Director General of General Department of Local Administration. (20,25,38) Research was unable to determine whether these coordinating bodies were active during the reporting period.
National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT)	Coordinates government, NGO, civil society, and private sector efforts to address trafficking in persons and sexual exploitation. (3,23,25,79) Produces an annual report documenting the government's anti-trafficking in persons efforts. (3) Focuses on children's affairs, international cooperation, justice, law enforcement, migration, prevention, protection, recovery, reintegration, and repatriation. (80) Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, with 4 vice chair ministries and 14 participating ministries. (26,30) Oversees Provincial Committees for Counter Trafficking in each province. (3,30,81) Has six working groups with inter-ministerial membership, each chaired by one ministry, including Prevention (Minister of Education); Protection, Recovery, Reintegration, and Repatriation (Minister of Social Affairs); Law Enforcement (Chief of the Cambodian National Police); Justice (Minister of Justice); International Cooperation (Minister of Women's Affairs); and Migration and Labor (Minister of Labor). (3,23,26) Produced an annual report documenting anti-trafficking efforts; however, the report was not exhaustive amidst insufficient data collection. (11) In August 2021, launched a 5-year Anti-Trafficking in Persons project (2021–2026), which will focus on addressing the root causes of human trafficking and protecting vulnerable people, including children from trafficking, labor abuse, and risky migration. (82) In cooperation with Plan Thailand, Cambodia Acts, and the Education Ministry, led a study to identify the needs of bilingual Khmer-Thai Cambodian children who live in Cambodia's Koh Kong Province and Thailand's Trat Province, which was developed to improve access to education for children as they move across the border with their migrant parents and to reduce the risk of trafficking and child labor. (43)
National Committee on Child Protection	Coordinates inter-ministerial action on strengthening Cambodia's child protection system, and preventing and addressing all forms of abuses and violence against children. (15) Reviews and addresses gaps in the legal framework, government policies, and national action plans related to child protection and promoting the effectiveness of law enforcement. Provides technical advice and assistance to enhance child protection. (15) Research was unable to determine whether this coordinating body was active during the reporting period.

Inter-ministerial coordination remains a serious challenge in Cambodia, both for countering child labor and trafficking in persons. (2) The ILO has joined the National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT) and some

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of the National Committee on Countering Child Labor (NCCT) working groups. However, the coordinating body on child labor, the NCCL, has not invited the ILO to participate in its meetings. (2) Additionally, the Commune Committees for Women and Children continue to be underfunded. (38)

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 Plans of Action on Combating the Worst Forms of Child Labor	National Plan of Action on the Reduction of Child Labor and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2016–2025) aims to build the capacity of law enforcement officers, strengthen the enforcement of relevant laws, raise public awareness of child labor issues, and enhance child labor monitoring systems at the community level. (20) Overseen by MOLVT. (15) Creates a roadmap to the complete eradication of the worst forms of child labor by 2025 in various sectors, including services, agriculture, mining, and energy. (22,38,50,76) Mandates awareness-raising activities, legal action, and collaborations with civil society actors. (76) During the reporting period, committees continued to prepare a 5-year progress report for endorsement. (2)
Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children (2017–2021)	Led by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. (63,77) Developed in response to the Cambodia Violence Against Children Survey conducted in 2013. (26,77) Aims to prevent and respond to violence against children, including the worst forms of child labor. (26,42,84) Provides OSEC-related interventions in policy and governance, including: providing training for teachers and developing curriculum to help children build online safety skills; providing OSEC materials to law enforcement; and developing an online hotline to help identify platforms that support the perpetuation of OSEC. (11,26) Works to properly assess the scale and specific nature of OSEC in Cambodia to inform policy. (11) During the reporting period, continued to develop policies related to “child-friendly schools,” including preventing malnutrition. (2)
Action Plan for Gender Equality Promotion and Child Labor Elimination in the Fisheries Sector (2016–2020)	Overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries under the Fisheries Administration of Cambodia (FiA). Aligned with the Strategic Planning Framework for Fisheries (2010–2019). (22) Sought to prevent and withdraw children from child labor and hazardous work in the fisheries sector. (85) During the reporting period, government conducted campaigns and organized workshops to raise awareness of child labor and gender equity, targeting women and children in freshwater fishing areas around the Tonle Sap Lake. (2)
Third 5-Year National Plan of Action on the Suppression of Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Labor, and Sexual Exploitation (2019–2023)	Coordinated by NCCT, with input from the Ministries of Justice; Women's Affairs; Foreign Affairs; Labor; and Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation. (10) Aims to prevent and eliminate all forms of human trafficking, including by strengthening criminal law enforcement to protect children from exploitation in entertainment venues, integrating anti-human trafficking and child safety issues into the public school curriculum, and promoting the inclusion of vulnerable children in both formal and informal education. (84) Focused on four strategies: 1) strengthening cooperation in the formulation and implementation of laws, policies, and legal standards; 2) promoting efforts to prevent of all forms of human trafficking; 3) strengthening the criminal justice system; and 4) increasing protection of victims. (29) Research was unable to determine whether these coordinating bodies were active during the reporting period.
Strategic and Operational Plan for the Implementation of Juvenile Justice Law (2018–2020)	Overseen by Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSAVY), funded by UNICEF. Sought to build a sustainable juvenile justice system, and to provide effective protection and support to incarcerated juveniles who were vulnerable to child labor. (10) During the reporting period, focused on building a sustainable juvenile justice system, and providing effective protection and support to children in conflict with the law. As a result, children in conflict with the law who were in correction centers could more easily access education, healthcare, counseling, and guidance on vocational training. (15) During the reporting year, issued the first diversion order in Kampong Cham; a diversion refers to directing the path of an accused child away from formal court proceedings and toward a more constructive and positive solution. (86)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (8,80,87-90)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors.

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Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Cambodia Countering Trafficking in Persons (CCTIP) (2015–2020)	\$10 million, USAID-funded, 5-year (included a 1-year cost extension) program implemented by Winrock International to strengthen the capacity of government and community stakeholders to prevent human trafficking, protect at-risk populations, and increase the number of successful prosecutions of perpetrators. (63,91) In December 2021, the CCTIP project in collaboration with NCCT released a mid-term review report of the NCCT's 5-year national strategic plan for CCTIP 2019–2023. The mid-term review was conducted to assess the establishment and functions of all PCCTs and all technical working groups under NCCT, the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the strategy, the results and achievement against the set targets; and to provide concrete recommendations for reinforcement of mechanisms to implement, monitor, and report CCTIP efforts in Cambodia. (2,91)
Better Factories Cambodia†	USDOL, the Government of Cambodia, Garment Manufacturers in Cambodia, and ILO-funded program to monitor garment factories' compliance with national and international labor standards, including those related to child labor. (9,63) Additional information is available on the program's website. During the reporting period, completed 552 virtual compliance checks and found no instances of child labor or suspected child labor. (2)
UN WFP Country Program† (2020–2024)	Multi-government and private sector-funded program implemented in collaboration with the Government of Cambodia that includes a school feeding program for children in need. (92) In 2021, provided school meals to 300,000 vulnerable and poor school children; cash assistance to 3,745 households (18,625 individuals) affected by floods in Pursat, Battambang, and Banteay Meanchey provinces; and capacity strengthening to national and sub-national authorities (the National Committee for Disaster Management and its sub-national authorities) on emergency preparedness and response. (2)
Child Protection Programs: Family Care First (FCF REACT) (2015–2023) and Cambodia Child Protection Program	<p>Family Care First (FCF REACT) is led by MOSAVY. Funded by the European Union, USAID, the GHR Foundation, Save the Children Hong Kong, and UNICEF. (36,63) Aims to support more than 7,000 Cambodian children to live in safe, nurturing, family-based care. (36,63,93) Activities include supporting the development of Social Service Workforce Training curriculum modules, the reintegration of children from residential care institutions to family-based care, the closure and transition of residential care institutions, the provision of prevention and response social services, and continued strengthening of Cambodia's alternative care system. (2) Secretariat and Advisory Board collaborate with ministries, institutions, and relevant NGOs to review, amend, and develop policies, legal standards, concept notes, and strategic plans to support the common goal of ensuring safe, nurturing family-based care for Cambodian children. (11) During the reporting period, awarded over \$1 million to six local partners to implement child protection activities and approximately \$550,000 to six partners to implement livelihood interventions. Additionally, provided cash transfers to 750 households in 15 provinces to mitigate the financial impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable families. (2)</p> <p>Cambodia Child Protection Program (2009–2023) is led by UNICEF and MOSAVY. Aims to strengthen the child protection system in Cambodia and to prevent and reduce violence against children and unnecessary family separation. (15,38) Builds capacity of national and sub-national authorities in all 25 provinces to formulate and implement nationally approved institutional and legal frameworks. Includes capacity building of the government and civil society child protection workforce to provide direct services delivery to vulnerable children and families. (15) During the reporting period, launched the Child Protection Information Management System, which will enable public-private organizations to measure progress in child protection against 50 key indicators. (2,94)</p>
Cambodia Consortium for Out of School Children—Phase II (2017–2023)	Implemented by Education a Child, Aide et Action, and the Cambodian Consortium for Out of School Children, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports. (2,95-96) Aims to improve access to equitable, high-quality education in 25 provinces in Cambodia for over 116,000 primary school children who are out of school. Focus is on equitable access, quality education, ownership, and accountability. (95,97) In 2021, supported approximately 1,060 out-of-school children to access education. It focused on ensuring that schools have adequate infrastructure and are a safe space for students, built 11 new schools and 78 new classrooms, as well as refurbished 414 classrooms in provinces across Cambodia. (2)

† Program is funded by the Government of Cambodia.

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

In 2021, MOLVT visited 170 brick kilns and intervened to help 350 cases involving children who may be vulnerable to child labor and were living on brick kilns or on cassava plantations, with education, vocational training, and jobs. However, MOLVT did not remove any children from child labor as a result of labor inspections. (2,43) MOLVT also disseminated material on child labor prevention to commercial and family-based sugar-cane production operations. (2,43)

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The government lacked sufficient funding to put a system in place to monitor and promote the reintegration of victims of forced labor and human trafficking, including children. As a result, victims are left vulnerable, leaving the government heavily reliant on NGOs to fill this need. (3,14,26,70)

Many poor households in rural communities lack access to a social protection safety net, increasing the vulnerability of children to child labor as a means to supplement family income. (30) Although Cambodia has implemented programs that target child labor, the scope and resources provided to these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem. (10,11)

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 Cambodia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure the minimum age for work applies to all children, including those engaged in informal work in domestic work and employed by their relatives.	2018 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of a child for pornographic performances.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2021
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2009 – 2021
Enforcement	Build the capacity of labor law enforcement authorities to enforce child and forced labor regulations by providing more technical training opportunities on how to properly identify child labor during inspections, and offer sufficient resources to labor law authorities to ensure the enforcement of child labor laws through investigations and inspections, including unannounced inspections.	2012 – 2021
	Ensure and permit labor inspectors conduct inspections in the construction and entertainment sectors and impose penalties when child labor violations are found.	2021
	Ensure inspectors of construction sites are trained on child labor violations and that such training is coordinated with Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training's labor inspectorate.	2021
	Ensure the labor inspectorate conducts unannounced inspections as a matter of practice, not only when requests are made or violations are reported.	2021
	Establish and uniformly administer penalties for violations of laws on child labor, including its worst forms, in accordance with the parameters prescribed by law.	2009 – 2021
	Collect, properly store, and publicly release disaggregated data on labor and criminal law enforcement efforts, including labor inspectorate funding, initial training for new criminal investigators, routine inspections conducted, the number of prosecutions initiated, the number of convictions, and the number of penalties imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that malfeasance is addressed in all law enforcement agencies, including not accepting bribes to influence the outcome of cases or forging identity documents for trafficking in persons purposes, providing tip offs in advance of raids, and investigating and prosecuting politically connected individuals and government officials who are complicit in facilitating and profiting from the worst forms of child labor, including debt-based forced labor in brick kilns.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that all criminal law enforcement officials are sufficiently trained on the techniques of how to conduct anti-trafficking work, particularly those located in rural areas and in brick kilns.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that funding for criminal law enforcement agencies is sufficient to cover all expenses, including transportation costs, for law enforcement officials.	2019 – 2021
	Address the misuse of resources by law enforcement officials to convict defendants for politically motivated reasons, and ensure that all individuals accused of commercial sexual exploitation of children are prosecuted and charged according to the law.	2019 – 2021
Coordination	Protect and prevent intimidation of human trafficking victims and allow them access to protection services pending court proceedings.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that the Commune Committees for Women and Children are able to carry out their intended mandate.	2019 – 2021
	Increase funding for the Commune Committees for Women and Children.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that annual reports produced by the National Committee for Counter Trafficking are comprehensive.	2020 – 2021
	Improve inter-ministerial coordination by allowing ILO to participate in meetings of the National Committee on Countering Child Labor.	2021

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Government Policies	Publish activities undertaken to implement the Third 5-year National Plan of Action on the Suppression of Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Labor, and Sexual Exploitation (2019–2023) during the reporting period.	2021
Social Programs	Publish the results of the 2019 nationwide child labor survey.	2020 – 2021
	Strengthen child protection services, gatekeeping mechanisms, and the alternative care system to reduce the number of children unnecessarily placed in residential care and ensure that Residential Care Facilities and orphanages protect the health and well-being of children living in them.	2019 – 2021
	Increase access to free basic education by eliminating unofficial school-related fees; addressing issues related to limited transportation and inadequate school infrastructure, including the number of teachers, and the need for a birth certificate to enroll in school; eliminating barriers to school for children with disabilities; and providing safe, sanitary schools with access to water and latrines.	2013 – 2021
	Establish a system to accurately capture and monitor the reintegration of victims of the worst forms of child labor, including human trafficking.	2019 – 2021
	Expand social protection safety nets in rural areas to ensure that poor children and their families have access to services that may mitigate the risk of involvement in child labor.	2016 – 2021
	Provide sufficient resources to all social programs so that they can fully address the extent of child labor in Cambodia, including online sexual exploitation of children.	2019 – 2021

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