

In 2021, the Republic of the Congo made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the government conducted its first-ever nationwide child labor survey in coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund. The government also renewed a bilateral agreement with the Democratic Republic of the Congo that formalized regular bilateral collaboration to support trafficking victims and share information on suspected traffickers. In addition, the implementation of ministerial decrees aimed at protecting indigenous peoples' rights continued to result in an increase in the number of indigenous children enrolled in the school system. However, children in the Republic of the Congo are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced domestic work. The government has yet to accede to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, and existing programs are not sufficient to address the scope of child labor in all relevant sectors. In addition, the country lacks a national policy to address child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in the Republic of the Congo (ROC) are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced domestic work. (1-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in the ROC. 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	25.4 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	92.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	27.1
Primary Completion Rate (%)		71.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2012, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 5 (MICS5), 2014–2015. (7)

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

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, including in the production of manioc, peanuts, corn, plantains, potatoes, and sugarcane (1,4,8,9) Fishing (1,8)
Industry	Working in stone quarries,† including breaking stones (1,2,8,10,11)
Services	Domestic work (1-4,8) Market vending and carrying heavy loads‡ (1-4,8,9)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,8,12,13) Forced labor in farming, including in the production of cocoa, fishing, domestic work, and working in stone quarries (1,4,9,13,14) Forced labor in market vending and working in bakeries (4,13,14) Forced labor of indigenous Baka, Aka, and Kola children in farming, including in the production of manioc, and in fishing, hunting, and domestic work (1,4,9,14,15)

† 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.

Congo, Republic of the

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT




In some rural areas, the majority ethnic Bantu population forces non-majority, indigenous children—such as from the Baka, Aka, and Kola groups—to perform agricultural work, including forced work, for low wages and under the threat of physical abuse. Within the ROC, internal child trafficking networks relocate children from rural areas to urban centers for forced labor in domestic work and market vending. (2,4,8,13) In urban environments, children from West Africa work in forced domestic servitude for West African families in the major cities of Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville. (3,4) Many foreign children subjected to forced domestic work or commercial sexual exploitation in the ROC originate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and other West African nations, including Benin. (4,5,8,11,16) While the ROC conducted a national child labor survey, information on children's work is limited because the results have not yet been published. (13)

The Constitution stipulates that education is free until age 16; in practice, however, some parents are required to pay for books, uniforms, and school fees, which may limit access to education for some children. (1,17) Prohibitive school fees, the absence of sanitation facilities, a lack of teachers, and sexual abuse in schools also pose barriers to education for some children, particularly in refugee camps and non-urban areas. (1,2,4,8,18) Indigenous children throughout the country may experience discrimination, linguistic barriers, prohibitive school fees, and long distances to travel to schools. (2,4,8,10,17,19) The government offered an expenses subsidy—"tuition waiver"—for indigenous children, a program that provides money to families for students to buy uniforms, supplies, and procure health insurance, but research indicated that schools provided this waiver inconsistently during the reporting period. (8)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The ROC 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).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 116 of the Labor Code; Article 68 of the Child Protection Code (20,21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 68 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 4, 5, 8, and 9 of Order 2224 of 1953 (21,22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 4, 5, 8, and 9 of Order 2224 of 1953 (22)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 4 of the Labor Code; Articles 68 and 122 of the Child Protection Code; Article 33 of the Constitution; Articles 4, 5, 6, and 14 of Law No. 22-2019 on Combatting Trafficking in Persons (20,21,23,24)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 2, 4, and 6 of Law No. 22-2019 on Combating Trafficking in Persons (24)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 60, 65–68, and 122 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 334 and 335 of the Penal Code (21,25)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 68–70 and 122 of the Child Protection Code (21)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 30 of the Military and Gendarmerie Code (26)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 49 of the Child Protection Code (21)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 49 and 111 of the Child Protection Code (21)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 29 of the Constitution; Articles 1 and 3 of the Education Law (23,27)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 29 of the Constitution; Article 1 of the Education Law (23,27)

* Country has no conscription (28)

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 Social Security (MOL)	Enforces child labor laws. (17) Conducts initial inspections before referring cases to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ) for prosecution, and offers support to victims afterwards. (8)
Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ)	Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor. Dedicates two judges to child protection cases. (1) Leads child labor law enforcement efforts. (8)
Ministry of the Interior's National Police	Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor and conducts initial investigations into cases of forced labor, human trafficking, and the use of children in illicit activities. Conducts operations to rescue trafficked children used in child labor. (1,2,4,8)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in the ROC took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including lack of sufficient resources.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Labor Inspectors	248 (4)	248 (8)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (20)	Yes (20)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (4)	No (8)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	No (4)	N/A (8)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (4)	No (8)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)

Congo, Republic of the

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown	Unknown (8)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (20)	Yes (20)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	No (4)	No (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (4)	No (8)

The government did not provide comprehensive information about labor law enforcement operations, such as number of inspections, violations found, and penalties applied, for inclusion in this report. (8) Research found inspectors do not have access to government vehicles and rely on the employers whose businesses are being inspected to provide transportation. (10,29) Although the government lacks a formal process for referring children found in situations of child labor to appropriate social services providers, individual labor inspectors may leverage personal connections with their counterparts in other ministries to refer children found during inspections to social services. (2-4,8) Further, training opportunities for labor inspectors, particularly for lower-level staff, are very limited due to a lack of resources, including budget shortfalls, and a lack of Internet access. (15,30)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in the ROC took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient allocation of financial resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (30)	N/A (8)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (30)	N/A (8)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (4)	No (8)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (4)	Unknown (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	No (4)	No (8)

The government provides funding for investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of suspected traffickers in the context of broader judicial and law enforcement programs. (3) In general, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (MOJ), and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity (MSA) experienced difficulties in prosecuting offenders due to a weak judicial system, poor recordkeeping, a large backlog of cases in the high court, courts that convene infrequently and irregularly, and criminal law enforcement officials' and judges' uneven knowledge of anti-trafficking legislation and the Child Protection Code. (5,15)

The MSA, MOL, MOJ, and the National Police work together to enforce criminal laws against child trafficking; however, their efforts are limited to Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. In addition, the National Police sometime demand payments from NGOs and other stakeholders to assist in or execute operations to rescue survivors of child trafficking. (1,8,15) Police officers are not paid overtime, and there is a lack of resources such as funds for fuel. (8) Research found that many police did not understand what constituted child labor, and that court and MOJ personnel did not fully understand or know how to handle child labor cases. (4)

During the reporting period, the ROC worked with the DRC and Benin to prohibit minors from coming into the ROC without their parents as part of an agreement reached in 2020, and advanced proceedings to formalize

these agreements as a domestic legal framework clarifying legal responsibilities under existing anti-trafficking laws. (9) The government also held a workshop for law enforcement professionals. (8) In 2021, the government repatriated eight trafficked children to Benin whose traffickers were convicted in 2019; the children received shelter, food, medical care, and psychological support. (8,9,13) Additionally, the ROC is working with the DRC to institute a reciprocal referral mechanism agreement that is identical to the one it has with Benin. (8)

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 lack of adequate resources.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity (MSA)	Promotes the rights of vulnerable groups and contributes to anti-trafficking efforts by providing social welfare assistance to survivors. (1,31) May conduct initial inspections before referring cases to MOJ for prosecution. (1) Through its Director General of Social Affairs, oversees government strategy to address human trafficking. (15) Through its Task Force, leads efforts to address human trafficking in Pointe-Noire, designates foster families to receive victims, and assists in repatriating or reintegrating victims. (1) Although there is a line item in the MSA's budget for activities to combat human trafficking, funds are disbursed irregularly or not at all. (15)
Anti-Trafficking Coordinating Committee for Pointe-Noire (MSA Task Force)	With UNICEF support, coordinates all efforts to address trafficking of West African children in Pointe-Noire. Chaired by MSA with representatives from other government agencies and civil society organizations. (1,3,5,14) Seeks to prevent and prosecute cases of human trafficking and provides support to survivors through placement with foster families. (5,32) The Committee did not meet during the reporting period. (8)
National Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons	Coordinates government efforts on trafficking in persons and forced labor as a federal-level, interministerial committee. (3) Article 34 of the 2019 Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons provides a dedicated line item for funding. (33) The Commission did not receive funding from the government and did not meet during the reporting period. (8)

During the reporting period, the MOJ carried out a public awareness campaign to inform government officials, NGOs, and members of the indigenous community about their civil and political rights, gender-based violence, and the anti-trafficking law in the north of the country. (13) Also in 2021, the government signed a renewed bilateral agreement with the DRC which formalized regular bilateral conversations and collaboration to support trafficking victims and share information on suspected traffickers. Additionally, MSA staff maintained regular contact with counterparts in Benin about trafficking in persons issues, ongoing cases, and repatriation efforts. (13)

The government has not provided the MSA Task Force with a specific operating budget since 2014, limiting the Task Force's activities due to lack of funds. In addition, a local NGO has indicated that it refers cases to the Beninese consulate rather than the MSA Task Force because the majority of victims are Beninese and the MSA Task Force is unable to provide the NGO with financial support. (14,15) Furthermore, there is no coordinating body to oversee efforts to address child labor at the national level. (1,32)

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 lack of a national child labor action plan.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Education Sector Strategy (2015–2025)	Developed as an update to the previous 2012–2020 strategy, focuses on the priorities of offering quality basic education for all, addressing the human resources needs for the country's developing economy, and creating mechanisms for the efficient management of an educational system. (34)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (15,16)

During the reporting period the government revised its national action plan to address trafficking in persons, holding several discussion meetings. However, a new national action plan was not adopted in 2021. (13)

Congo, Republic of the

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

The government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the Education Sector Policy (2015–2025), and research found no evidence of a general policy on child labor. (34) Furthermore, research did not discover a national action plan that addresses trafficking in persons.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including inadequate efforts to address child labor in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Safety Net Program (LISUNGI) and Additional Financing (2014–2022)	World Bank-funded project that grants improved access to health and education services to poor families in Brazzaville, Cuvette, and Pointe-Noire. (35) Includes a cash transfer program for households conditioned upon regular health visits and an 80 percent school attendance rate every month by the children of participating households. (2,35) During the reporting period, in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the government reinforced its “Lisungi” social safety net program for approximately 200,000 households nationwide. Households received an additional \$85 from the government’s COVID-19 Solidarity Fund. (8)
McGovern–Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (2017–2022)	\$30 million United States Department of Agriculture-funded, 5-year project implemented by WFP in Bouenza, Cuvette, Lékoumou, Likouala, Plateaux, Pool, and Sangha. Aims to improve literacy of school-age children, increase healthy dietary practices, build capacity of government institutions, improve policy and regulatory frameworks, and increase government support and engagement of local organizations and community groups. (36,37) During the reporting period, the program fed as many as 380,000 children in the country. It has been renewed for an additional 5 years. (11)
Observe, Reflect, Act Schools	Ministry of Education program supported by UNICEF, the EU, and WFP to improve access to education for indigenous children through a 2- or 3-year program to prepare them for schooling. (11,38) Identifies children who should be added to the civil register, provides school supplies to students, and raises awareness among indigenous families about the importance of education. The schools continued to operate during the reporting period, but sources indicate that they are funded primarily by international organizations, private companies, or the local communities, and that teachers are unpaid and work on a voluntary basis. (9,11,30,39,40)

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

During the reporting period, the MSA conducted the ROC’s first-ever nationwide child labor survey in coordination with UNICEF. The survey results indicated the existence of a human trafficking ring, identified trafficking cases and efforts made by officials in addressing trafficking in persons, as well as gaps in coordination between security forces and social services on the ROC’s borders with its neighbors. (13) Additionally, the implementation of six 2019 ministerial decrees aimed at protecting indigenous peoples’ rights continued to result in an increase in the number of indigenous children enrolled in the school system, with one decree guaranteeing the right to a birth certificate and another the right to access primary schooling. (13,41)

Existing government programs are not sufficient to address the scope of child labor in all relevant sectors, such as domestic work or commercial sexual exploitation. (8)

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 the ROC (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2015 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that the government establishes a formal process for referring children to the appropriate social services when they are found in situations of child labor.	2020 – 2021
	Publish information related to labor and criminal law enforcement statistics, including the funding level for the labor inspectorate, the number and type of labor inspections conducted, violations found, penalties imposed and collected for child labor violations, number of criminal investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, and convictions secured.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that all criminal law enforcement personnel, including from the police forces, courts, and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, are properly trained to know how to identify, recognize, prosecute, and handle worst forms of child labor cases.	2020 – 2021
	Institutionalize training for all labor inspectors, investigators, and law enforcement officers, including offering periodic refresher courses.	2014 – 2021
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by ensuring that inspectors have adequate resources to carry out their mandated inspection duties.	2015 – 2021
	Remove barriers to enforcement and prosecution by strengthening the judicial system through improved recordkeeping, decreased court backlogs, more frequent hearings, and improved training for criminal law enforcement officials and judges on trafficking in persons legislation.	2014 – 2021
	Expand criminal law enforcement efforts beyond large cities.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that criminal enforcement agencies such as the National Police are properly funded and do not seek payment from stakeholders to conduct investigations and operations.	2014 – 2021
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies receive adequate resources to function as intended.	2014 – 2021
	Establish a coordinating mechanism to address child labor, including its worst forms, at the national level.	2009 – 2021
	Ensure that funds budgeted for the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity to address human trafficking are regularly disbursed.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and able to carry out their intended mandates.	2021
Government Policies	Adopt a plan that addresses all relevant forms of trafficking in persons.	2020 – 2021
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into existing relevant policies.	2009 – 2021
	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant forms of child labor and the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2021
Social Programs	Publish the results of the national child labor survey to determine the activities carried out by working children to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2021
	Improve access to education for all children, including those in non-urban areas, regardless of refugee status or ethnicity, by eliminating all school-related fees, regulating classroom size, removing linguistic barriers, providing sanitation facilities, building additional schools, training additional teachers, and ensuring that students are not subjected to sexual abuse.	2009 – 2021
	Fund and implement social programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including programs to expand access to free education and to address child domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation.	2018 – 2021
	Ensure indigenous children do not experience discrimination or barriers to education.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that the "tuition waiver program" for indigenous children is consistently applied.	2020 – 2021

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Congo, Republic of the

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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