

In 2021, Gabon made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, authorities removed more than 30 children from exploitive settings and provided them with government services. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Gabon is receiving an assessment of minimal advancement because it continued to implement a practice that delayed advancement to eliminate child labor. The government failed to provide evidence it conducted worksite inspections during the reporting period. Labor inspections are a key tool for identifying child labor violations, and their absence makes children more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Children in Gabon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work. Gabonese law regarding minimum age for work provisions only applies to children in formal employment relationships, which does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age for work. In addition, labor inspectors lack the basic resources necessary to conduct investigations. Finally, Gabon does not have a policy that addresses all relevant forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Gabon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work. (1-6) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Gabon. 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	22.3 (83,073)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	94.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	23.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		78.4

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (7)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Deuxième Enquête Démographique et de Santé au Gabon (EDSG-II), 2012. (8)

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 the production and sale of smoked fish (6,9,10)
Industry	Working in sand quarries† (1,6,10)
	Working in brick factories (6,10)
Services	Domestic work (3-6,10)
	Street vending, including windshield cleaning, cleaning market spaces at night, and carrying heavy loads† (5,6,9)
	Garbage scavenging (6,10)
	Working in transportation, including minibuses,† and as mechanics (1,2,6)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in markets, restaurants, handicraft shops, sand quarries, gold mines, farming, animal husbandry, fishing, domestic work, and as mechanics (1,3,6,12)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4-6,10,13)

† 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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Gabon is primarily a destination and transit country for victims of child trafficking from other countries in Central and West Africa. (6,14) Some parents entrust their children to intermediaries who promise education and safe work opportunities; instead, these children are sometimes subjected to child trafficking for labor exploitation. (6,14,15) There are reports that child victims of forced labor mainly work in the informal sector as street vendors, often selling beauty products and fruits. Boys often work in fishing, microbus transportation, mechanics shops, and cleaning market spaces after they have closed. (6,9,13) Reports also indicate that West African human traffickers reportedly exploit children from their countries of origin to work in Libreville markets and in other urban centers, including Port-Gentil. (6,7,13)

Although the Law on General Education guarantees the right to free and compulsory education, in practice, students must pay for supplies and school fees, which may be prohibitive. (10,16) Due to a lack of teachers and poor school infrastructure, education beyond primary school is often unavailable. (6,17) In addition, children living in remote areas may not receive birth certificates, which are often required for school enrollment, and children who do not attend school are more vulnerable to child labor. (6)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Gabon has ratified all 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 Gabon's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	16	Article 177 of the Labor Code; Article 2 of the Decree on Establishing Individual Exceptions to the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (18-20)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of the Hazardous Work List (18,19,21)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 2, 3, and 5 of the Hazardous Work List (18,19,21)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 225 to 225-7 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code; Articles 3, 12, and 13 of Law N° 09/04 Preventing and Fighting Against Child Trafficking; Article 4 of the Labor Code (18,22,23)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 3, 11–14, and 20 of Law N° 09/04 Preventing and Fighting Against Child Trafficking; Article 278 bis of the Penal Code; Articles 225 to 225-7 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code (22,23)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 260, 261, and 263 of the Penal Code; Articles 225 to 225-7 and Articles 281-3 to 281-5 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code (23,24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 281-1 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code (23)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 17 of the Law on the Organization of National Defense and Public Security (25)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes*		Article 17 of the Law on the Organization of National Defense and Public Security (25)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 1 of the Constitution; Article 2 of Act N° 21/2011 on General Education; Article 340-6 of the Revised 2020 Penal Code (23,16,26)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 1.18 and 1.19 of the Constitution; Article 2 of Act N° 21/2011 on General Education (16,26)

* Country has no conscription (27)

Although the Labor Code prohibits work by children under age 16, the minimum age protections do not apply to children outside of formal work relationships, which does not conform to international standards that require all children be protected under the law. (2,18,22,23) Article 2 of Decree N° 0651/PR/MTEPS Establishing Individual Exceptions to the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment permits children under age 16 to perform light work with parental permission. However, it does not set a minimum age, determine the activities in which light work may be permitted, prescribe the number of hours per week for light work, or specify the conditions in which light work may be undertaken. (20)

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 child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Employment, Public Function, Labor and Professional Training	Receives, investigates, and addresses child labor complaints through its inspectors. (17) Refers cases of child trafficking to the Ministry of the Interior's Police Force for investigation and the Ministry of Health, Social Protection and National Solidarity (MSPNS) for social services. (1,6)
Ministry of the Interior's Police Force	Enforces laws, investigates child labor violations, and refers cases to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution. (6,17) Refers cases of child labor to the MSPNS. The shelters for referred children are run by or work in close coordination with MSPNS. (6,13)
Ministry of Justice	Enforces child labor laws by prosecuting child labor cases. Coordinates activities of the agencies responsible for enforcing criminal laws against child forced labor/trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. (6) Assists in supporting victims of child trafficking while prosecutors and investigators prepare their cases. (1,6)

While active, the Ministry of Employment, Public Function, Labor and Professional Training did not carry out its mandated role during the reporting period, which includes addressing child labor complaints. (6)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, the absence of worksite inspections conducted at the national level in Gabon may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws. (Table 6)

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (10)	Unknown (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown (10)	Unknown (6)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (10)	Yes (18)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (10)	No (6)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (10)	N/A (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (10)	No (6)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	0 (10)	0 (6)
Number Conducted at Worksite	N/A (10)	N/A (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (10)	0 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (10)	N/A (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (10)	N/A (6)
Routine Inspections Conducted	N/A (10)	N/A (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (10)	N/A (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (18)	Yes (18)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	No (10)	No (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (10)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (10)	Yes (6)

While the government did not provide information on labor inspectorate funding or the number of labor inspectors, research indicates inadequate resources, including an insufficient number of inspectors, may have hampered the labor inspectorate's capacity to adequately conduct inspections and enforce labor laws throughout the country. (2,6,13,17) In addition, labor inspectors in Gabon are responsible for reconciling labor disputes, which may detract from their primary duty of inspection. (18)

Although inspectors have the authority to propose penalties to the court in accordance with legal guidelines, they do not have the authority to impose penalties since this is the purview of the court. The police take note of violations of child labor law, carry out investigations when further information is necessary, and refer cases to the court system within the Ministry of Justice's jurisdiction. (6)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Gabon 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 resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (10)	No (6)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (10)	N/A (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	N/A (10)	No (6)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (10)	Unknown (6)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (10)	Unknown (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	20 (28)	Unknown (6)
Number of Convictions	2 (28)	6 (6,29)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (10)	Yes (6,29)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (10)	Yes (6)

The government did not provide information on the number of investigations conducted, the number of violations found, or the number of prosecutions initiated for inclusion in this report. However, during the reporting period, authorities removed more than 30 children from exploitive settings; all of the children removed

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received services from the government. (6) In addition, the Ministry of Justice convicted six individuals on trafficking related charges. (29)

Despite these efforts, research has shown that a lack of resources, which included transportation and access to fuel, insufficient training, infrequent convening of the Criminal Court, a backlog of cases, and weak coordination among enforcement agencies hampered criminal enforcement efforts. In addition, evidence indicates that some child trafficking perpetrators falsified documents to make victims appear older than age 18 to avoid punishment under Gabon's child trafficking laws. (5,10,13,29) Research also found that Gabonese authorities do not have a consistent mechanism to report human trafficking statistics to Post. (13)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior	Coordinate national efforts against child trafficking and other worst forms of child labor. (6,17,29)
National Observatory for Children's Rights	Coordinates the implementation of the UN CRC, including the promotion of children's right to education and protection against all forms of exploitation and abuse. Establishes and oversees committees to protect children's rights in all provinces. (6,30)
Local Vigilance Committees	Identifies potential cases of child trafficking, intercept victims, and assist children at risk of child trafficking. (6,31)
Ministry of Social Affairs and Women's Rights & Ministry of Health, Social Protection and National Solidarity (MSPNS)	Provides social services and assistance to vulnerable children, assists in repatriation or resettlement processes for victims of child trafficking, and operates shelters for victims of child trafficking. (1,13) MSPNS can also refer cases to the Ministry of Justice, which may pursue criminal charges. (9,13)

Due to changes in the penal code criminalizing all forms of human trafficking, the Inter-Ministerial Committee for the Fight Against Child Trafficking became inactive pending corresponding changes to the 2004 law on child trafficking. Instead, the Ministries of Justice and Interior were charged with coordinating action against the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking. (6,9)

Research also indicates that the other coordinating committees lacked sufficient funding and members sometimes used their personal funds to support human trafficking victims. (1,10,32) All coordination committees were inactive during the reporting period. (6,10)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

Research found no evidence that the government has established policies to address child labor.

The government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) (2018–2022) (3,33,34)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to preventing child labor (Table 9). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Shelters for Children in Need	Provides social services to victims of child labor and child trafficking. The government provides support to shelters run by civil society organizations. (1,3,13,35) Victims received medical care, literacy training, and reintegration support. (1,6)

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Research found no evidence of a government program that directly addressed child labor. (1, 10) Research also indicates that shelter space is insufficient to accommodate all victims of human trafficking and other vulnerable children due to the government repeatedly decreasing funding for shelters and NGOs in previous years. (1, 3, 6, 10, 13, 31)

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 Gabon (Table 10).

Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that minimum age protections are extended to children working outside of formal employment relationships.	2017 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that the legal framework for light work establishes a minimum age no younger than age 13, determines activities that are considered light work, and specifies the conditions under which light work may be undertaken.	2013 – 2021
	Establish criminal prohibitions for the recruitment of children under age 18 for use in armed conflict by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2021
	Publish information on the funding level for the labor inspectorate, number of inspections, and number of labor inspectors, and ensure both inspectors and investigators receive adequate funding, training, and resources to carry out inspections and investigations.	2009 – 2021
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by having inspectors conduct routine and unannounced inspections, including in the informal sector.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that labor inspectors are not tasked with conciliation or arbitration duties so that they can carry out their primary duties of inspection and monitoring throughout the country.	2009 – 2021
	Ensure that the government conducts an adequate number of labor inspections and criminal investigations and publish criminal law enforcement information.	2018 – 2021
	Coordination	Ensure that coordinating bodies are sufficiently funded to carry out their mandates, remain active, and report on their activities.
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant forms of child labor, including in activities such as domestic work and work in transportation.	2015 – 2021
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into existing relevant policies.	2014 – 2021
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that children have access to education by eliminating school fees, increasing the number of teachers and schools in rural areas, and make efforts to provide all children with birth registration.	2010 – 2021
	Expand programs to address the scope of the child labor problem and ensure that the government continues to provide adequate support to victims of child labor, including sufficient shelter space for victims.	2010 – 2021

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