

In 2021, Maldives made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government enacted the Second Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act and established an Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office to implement the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan 2020–2022. Moreover, after the newly opened permanent shelter for survivors of trafficking was damaged in a storm, the government opened a different temporary shelter. However, although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work. The law does not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Moreover, the government does not have a policy or program to address all relevant worst forms of child labor in the country.



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

Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work. (1-4) Information on children's work is limited because a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Maldives.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	3.9 (2,364)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	79.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		91.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2009. (6)

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

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work (4)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2-4,7-9)
	Forced labor in domestic work (1,4)
	Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs (2,4,7,10)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor per se under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Maldivian children from the outer islands are brought to the capital, Malé, for domestic work. Once there, some of these children from impoverished families may be more vulnerable to sex trafficking. (4,11) In addition, some girls from Bangladesh are believed to be victims of human trafficking to Maldives for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. (4) There are also reports of foreign tourists engaging in commercial sexual exploitation of children. (4,9)

The right to free primary and secondary education is provided to all children, but there is a shortage of trained teachers in Maldives. (8,12,13) In addition, while there are primary schools on all islands, some students must

# Maldives




## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

travel to other islands to attend secondary school. In these instances, some children participate in domestic work in exchange for room and board; however, this practice has decreased in recent years. (7)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Maldives 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 Maldives' legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including failure to prohibit the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Sections 6 and 12 of the Employment Act; Article 26 of the Child Rights Protection Act; Section 8 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection (10,12,14)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 7 and 12 of the Employment Act (14)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 10 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection (10,15)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Section 3 of the Employment Act; Sections 10-14, 16-18, 21, and 25 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 3-8 and 11 of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Article 25 of the Constitution; Section 26 and 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act; (12-14,16,17)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Sections 10-14, 17-18, and 21 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 3-8 and 11 of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (16,17)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 17-19 of the Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders; Sections 11 and 123 of the Child Rights Protection Act; Sections 13-14, 17-18, and 21 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, Sections 4-8 and 11 of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (12,16-18)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 133(c)(1) of the Drugs Act; Article 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act (10,12,19)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Legislation title unknown
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 14 of the Education Act; Section 21 of the Child Rights Protection Act (12,13,20)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children; Articles 17–20 of the Education Act (13,20,21)

\* Country has no conscription (22)

Adopted in 2020, the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection established guidelines on children's participation in their family's line of work, along with a list of work in which children may not participate. (10)

In April 2021, the Second Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act was enacted. The amended Act expressly criminalizes the trafficking children across borders and internally for purposes of exploitation. (17) The definition of exploitation in the Act includes forced labor, forced marriages, and forced engagement in sexual activities or prostitution. (4,8,10,17) However, the laws prohibiting forced labor in Maldives are not sufficient overall as they do not criminalize slavery. Laws prohibiting child trafficking are also insufficient because they require the use of threats, the use of force, or coercion for the crime of child trafficking. (16,17) Moreover, laws in Maldives do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited. (12,17,18)

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Labor Relations Authority, Ministry of Economic Development	Enforces the Employment Act, including child labor provisions. Conducts labor inspections and issues fines for violations. (10,14)
Maldives Police Service (MPS)	The Family and Child Protection Department investigates complaints of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Refers cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for prosecution and to the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services to provide victim services. (23) Employs eight officers in Malé to investigate child labor cases, including child commercial sexual exploitation and child pornography cases. (23) The Anti-Human Trafficking Department investigates human trafficking-related offenses and enforces laws prohibiting trafficking in persons, including cases of child trafficking. (4,7) During 2021, led two awareness sessions for 151 MPS officers on human trafficking investigations, target areas, and the second amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. (24)
Prosecutor General's Office (PGO)	Independent office established to raise charges and oversee the conduct of criminal matters on behalf of the State. Investigates cases of child exploitation referred by MPS. (2,10) In cases regarding child exploitation and domestic violence, a victim support officer from the PGO's Witness and Victims Support Service Unit and a prosecutor will join the case to ensure the safety of the child victim by identifying imminent threats or probable risks. (2) Research was unable to determine whether activities were conducted during the reporting period.
Children's Ombudsperson	Has oversight functions to ensure that the rights of children are not violated. (2) Tasked with determining the extent to which state institutions adhere to the Child Rights Protection Act and the UN CRC, enforcing the implementation of the Act and the CRC, and monitoring and evaluating institutions and personnel involved in protecting children's rights. (25) In 2021, conducted an analysis of the legal framework concerning child labor and disseminated it to key stakeholders. Focus group discussions have been conducted for key stakeholders to identify pathways for collaboration and to highlight gaps in the Child Rights Protection Act and the relevant regulations. (10)
Child and Family Protection Service (CFPS), Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services	Oversees efforts to protect children; receives referrals of children who have been exploited, including in commercial sexual exploitation and drug trafficking; investigates cases; and provides care for survivors. (7,10,26) In 2021, the Family and Child Protection Service was absorbed into the CFPS, which has a broader mandate of safeguarding and promoting the interests of children. (26) During the reporting period, two child labor cases were referred to the CFPS. (10)

# Maldives

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Labor Relations Authority (LRA) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of training on new laws related to child labor.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$929,457 (27)	\$876,727 (10)
Number of Labor Inspectors	17 (2)	15 (10)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (14)	Yes (14)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (2)	Yes (10)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (2)	No (10)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (2)	Yes (10)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	62 (2)	124 (10)
Number Conducted at Worksite	62 (2)	124 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (2)	14 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (2)	0 (10)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (2)	N/A (10)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (10)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (2)	Yes (10)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (14)	Yes (14)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (10)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (2)	Yes (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (2)	Yes (10,24,26)

During the reporting period, new recruits received on-the-job training and were assigned mentors. Refresher trainings were held for all inspectors and officers; however, labor inspectors were not trained on the new laws related to child labor. (10,24) In addition to labor inspectors, the LRA also utilizes eight investigations officers to conduct inspections. All labor inspections look for child labor violations related to minimum age requirements as well as forced labor and hazardous work, but there are no officers dedicated to child labor issues. (10) The LRA reported that the number of inspections conducted in 2021 was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, in 2021, the LRA identified 14 children who were not working within the requirements of Section 10 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection. (10)

### Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Family and Child Protection Department of the Maldives Police Service (MPS) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including a lack of resources for investigators.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (2)	Yes (10)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (2)	Yes (10)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (2)	Yes (10)
Number of Investigations	0 (26)	0 (26)
Number of Violations Found	0 (26)	0 (10)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (26)	0 (10)
Number of Convictions	0 (2)	0 (10)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (2)	Unknown (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (10)

Four cases of child exploitation involving the use of children to commit criminal offences have been prosecuted since the enactment of the Child Rights Protection Act in November 2019. (10,15) During the reporting period,

the MPS held two trainings on human trafficking investigations, target areas, and the second Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act. In total, 151 officers participated in the trainings. (24)

The MPS also held 12 refresher sensitization trainings, reaching 400 officers. (24) Moreover, members of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee and eight frontline MPS officers participated in a virtual regional training workshop for professionals working in law enforcement agencies, focused on preventing child sexual abuse, exploitation, and child trafficking. Ten participants each from Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan law enforcement agencies also participated. (8) However, the MPS lacked sufficient resources and trained staff to be able to conduct investigations focused on child labor. (8)

### IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee	Manages all anti-human trafficking activities and implements the country's Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan. Chaired by Ministry of Defense leadership and consists of 10 participating government agencies. (11,16,28) During the reporting period, members participated in a regional training workshop on the prevention of child sexual abuse, exploitation and child-trafficking conducted and funded by ECPAT International and aimed at professionals working in law enforcement agencies. (8) The committee also began implementing the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan and held five virtual meetings. (29)
Council for Protecting the Rights of the Child	Established under the Child Rights Protection Act to inform the Minister on policies related to the rights of children and care provision, observe adherence to the CRC, advise the Minister on measures to stop violence against children, determine which child rights protection policies achieve the objectives of the Act, and bridge the gap between civil society organizations and policymakers on issues related to protection of children's rights. (10,26) During the reporting period, the council held 18 meetings focused on strengthening child state care mechanism policies and infrastructure, and on formulating action plans and programs to protect the rights of children. (30)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office (ATO)*	Established at the Ministry of Defense to implement the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan and undertake prevention efforts. In 2021, the ATO received a budget of \$129,450, secured a dedicated office premises, hired a policy and outreach consultant, and began implementing the National Action Plan. (24)

\* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

### 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 coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

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

Policy	Description
Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan (2020–2022)	Establishes the government's goals to address human trafficking, including creating institutions, coordinating activities, raising awareness, and building capacity. (31) During the reporting period, the National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee worked to revise the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act to align the definition of human trafficking with that of the 2000 United Nations Trafficking in Persons Protocol. It also established a dedicated office (ATO), hired a consultant to conduct policy and outreach work, secured a temporary shelter for survivors of trafficking after the newly constructed shelter was damaged due to weather, and engaged in public awareness efforts with Public Service Media, the IOM, and Mission for Migrant Workers Maldives to improve awareness of human trafficking issues. (8,10,24)

NGOs have stated that the lack of cohesive standard operating procedures that lay out specific roles for all agencies may have resulted in a lack of referrals and the possibility that victims were not identified, given the large number of migrant workers present in the country and the small number of victims identified. (8) However, during the reporting period, the government worked with IOM Maldives to revise the draft Victim Support and Shelter Guidelines, now renamed the Victims Assistance and Shelter Service (VASS) Regulation. The Guidelines aim to create standard operating procedures for victim identification, protection, and reintegration; shelter operations and victim services; and a formal referral system for victims that have been identified. (8) It is anticipated that the Guidelines will be published in 2022. (8)

# Maldives

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Research found no evidence of a policy designed to address other relevant forms of child labor, such as forced labor in domestic work or drug trafficking.

### 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 the inadequacy to address the problem in all sectors.

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

Program	Description
Family and Children's Service Centers†	Nineteen Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services-operated centers that provide psychosocial support for child victims of abuse and exploitation, four of which provide temporary shelter for victims. (2,32) While reported to be active during the reporting period, research was unable to determine what activities were undertaken.
National Victim Support Hotline (Number 1696)†	24-hour hotline dedicated to receiving reports of human trafficking and child labor. Formerly operated by the MPS but is in the process of being relocated to the ATO. (26) During the reporting period, the hotline was suspended as funding and operations for the line were being discussed between the ATO and the International Police and Line Foundation. (8)
Child Helpline (Number 1412)†	Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services-operated helpline established with the support of the MPS and UNICEF to provide advice on social support services and receive reports of violence against children. (26,32) During the reporting period, the Helpline was active 24 hours per day, 7 days a week and received 12,927 calls. A total of 430 new referrals were made to Family and Children's Service Centers. (30)

† Program is funded by the Government of Maldives.

Family and Children's Service Centers and shelters lack adequate financial and human resources, and staff are inadequately trained to deal with cases involving abused and exploited children. (32) During the reporting period, the government established a temporary human trafficking victim shelter in Gulhifalhu on Malé Atoll and launched social and digital awareness campaigns to mark World Anti-Trafficking in Persons Day and International Migrants Day. (10)

However, existing social programs do not specifically address commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, or forced labor in domestic work. Furthermore, no actions were taken to reduce demand for commercial sex or child sex tourism during the reporting period. (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 Maldives (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that laws prohibiting forced labor criminalize slavery.	2021
	Ensure that laws prohibiting child trafficking do not require the use of force, fraud and coercion.	2021
	Criminally prohibit all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including procuring, offering, and using children for pornographic performances.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspectors receive training that specifically focuses on child labor issues, including training on new laws, training for new employees, and refresher courses.	2009 – 2021
	Provide sufficient funding and training to the police, prosecutors, and other officials, and ensure that investigators have the resources necessary to enforce laws on the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2021
	Ensure that the Maldives Police Service and social services providers receive training on the differences between sex trafficking and sexual abuse, especially in cases involving children.	2020 – 2021
	Publish updates on cases received and prosecuted by the Prosecutor General's Office.	2021
	Publish activities undertaken by the Council for Protecting the Rights of the Children to coordinate efforts related to child labor.	2021
Coordination	Publish activities undertaken by the Council for Protecting the Rights of the Children to coordinate efforts related to child labor.	2021



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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Government Policies	Adopt a policy to address all relevant forms of child labor and forced labor, including domestic work and drug trafficking.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that adequate standard operating procedures for victim referrals, identification, and services are developed and effectively implemented.	2021
Social Programs	Conduct and publish a national child labor survey and conduct research on the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and child trafficking.	2009 – 2021
	Publish information about activities undertaken to implement social programs, including the Child Helpline and Family and Children's Service Centers.	2017 – 2021
	Provide sufficient funding, human resources, and staff training for Family and Child Service Centers and shelters that serve abused and exploited children.	2018 – 2021
	Implement and provide sufficient resources for programs that address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, and forced labor in domestic work.	2009 – 2021
	Improve access to secondary education, particularly for girls, including by ensuring an adequate number of teachers and secondary schools.	2021
	Ensure that adequate victim referral mechanisms are established and operational.	2021

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