

In 2021, Niger made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government created the National Steering Committee to Combat Child Labor. In addition, Niger signed a memorandum of understanding with Nigeria, formalizing cooperation agreements between the two governments to improve their collective response to human trafficking. Further, the government developed a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons and a Plan for Social and Economic Development. However, children in Niger are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in hereditary slavery and mining, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks herding livestock. The minimum age for work does not meet international standards because it does not apply to children in unpaid or non-contractual work. In addition, the government made no efforts to address the ongoing practice of *wahaya*, a form of child slavery that was upheld as illegal by a Nigerien court in 2019. Lastly, gaps in labor law enforcement also remain, including insufficient funding for labor inspectors to conduct inspections.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Niger are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in hereditary slavery and mining, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1-3) Children also perform dangerous tasks herding livestock. (4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Niger.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	42.9 (2,516,191)
Attending School (%)	7 to 14	48.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	22.1
Primary Completion Rate (%)		51.2

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 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2012. (6)

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

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of rice, fruits, nuts, and vegetables (4,7,8)
	Herding and caring for livestock, including cattle, sheep, goats, and fowl (8,9)
	Fishing, including river net casting (10)
Industry	Quarrying† and mining† for trona, salt, gypsum, and gold (1,3,4,11-14)
	Metal work† (15)
	Working in construction,† tanneries,† and slaughterhouses† (4,8,14,16,17)
	Brick making (14)
Services	Street work, including as market vendors, and begging† (4)
	Garbage scavenging (4)
	Domestic work (1,4,14)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,4,14,18,19)
	Forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (3,4,16)
	Hereditary and caste-based slavery, including for cattle herding, agricultural work, domestic work, and sexual exploitation (3,4,14,18)
	Forced begging (1,3,4,14,18,20-22)
	Forced labor in domestic work and mining (3,13,14)

† 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.

Children in Niger, especially boys and girls from the Arab, Djerma, Peulh, Tuareg, and Toubou ethnic minorities, continue to be exploited as slaves and endure slavery-like practices, particularly in the regions of Tahoua and Agadez. (4,16) Some children are born into slavery; others are born free but remain in a dependent status and are forced to work with their parents for their former masters in exchange for food, money, and lodging. (8,14,24,25) A particular form of slavery in Niger is the *wahaya* practice, in which men buy girls born into slavery, often between ages 9 and 14, as “fifth wives.” Even though Niger’s Supreme Court set legal precedent by ruling *wahaya* to be illegal in 2019, the government has made limited efforts to inform the public of the court’s ruling. (4,10,26) Child slaves, including those involved in the practice of *wahaya*, are forced to work long hours as cattle herders, agricultural workers, or domestic workers, and are often sexually exploited. (14,18,24,27) As with those involved in hereditary slavery, the children of *wahaya* wives are considered slaves and are passed from one owner to another as gifts or as part of dowries. (9,14,18,24,27,28)

In Niger, some Koranic teachers known as *marabouts* are known to subject their students, boys known as *talibés*, to manual labor or forced begging rather than providing them with a religious education. (1,3,4,18) Children in Niger participating in seasonal migration or migrant children from West Africa traveling to Algeria and Libya may also be subject to forced begging, or commercial sexual exploitation as a result of human trafficking. (20,22,29-31) In addition, Niger has a form of internal child trafficking called *confiage*, in which family members send their children to live with relatives or friends with promises of better educational or trade learning opportunities. However, some children are instead subjected to exploitation, including forced labor, sex trafficking, and domestic work. (14) Research indicates that the growing insecurity in some regions of the country due to extremist activity has seen an increase in children working in domestic service and street begging. (4)

Although the Constitution guarantees free education, school fees are often required. A lack of school infrastructure and school materials, and limited availability of teachers, especially in rural areas, impedes access to education, which may increase the vulnerability of children to the worst forms of child labor. (4) During the reporting period, hundreds of schools were closed due to insecurity and attacks by extremist groups in the Tillabéri, Tahoua, and Diffa regions. (4)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Niger 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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor (Cont.)

Convention	Ratification
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Niger'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	14	Article 106 of the Labor Code (32)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 159 of Decree No. 2017-682 (33)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 159–161 and 164–171 of Decree No. 2017-682; Article 181 of the Penal Code (33,34)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 14 of the Constitution; Article 4 and 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Article 270 of the Penal Code; Articles 2 and 10 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (32-36)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Articles 2 and 10 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons; Article 16 of the Law 2015-36 on Illicit Traffic of Migrants (32,33,36,37)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Articles 291 and 292 of the Penal Code; Articles 2 and 10 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (32-34,36)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Article 181 of the Penal Code; Articles 10 and 16 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (32-34,36)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 107 of the Labor Code (32)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code (32)
Compulsory Education Age	No		Article 8 of Decree No. 2017-935; Article 2 of the Law on the Orientation of the Educational System (38,39)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 23 of the Constitution; Article 8 of Decree No. 2017-935; Article 2 of the Law on the Orientation of the Educational System (35,38,39)

* Country has no conscription (40)

Although the Labor Code establishes age 14 as the minimum age for work, it does not apply to workers in the informal economy, which does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected under the law establishing a minimum age for work. (32,41) In addition, Article 2 of the Law on the Orientation of the Educational System in Niger guarantees education for all children ages 4 to 18, and Article 8 of Decree No. 2017-935 states that the government is required to promote access to compulsory education, particularly for young girls. However, Niger's law does not clearly articulate to which age groups the latter provision applies, thereby leaving some children at risk of not being covered and increasing the risk of children's involvement in child labor. (38,39)

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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 Employment, Labor and Social Security (MELSS)	Enforces labor laws and investigates Labor Code infractions, including those on child and forced labor. Conducts awareness-raising programs to address child labor. (4,31,42)
National Civil Police Force Morals and Minors Brigade	Investigates criminal cases involving minors, including issues pertaining to human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and hereditary slavery. Housed under the Ministry of Interior and Public Security. (4,11,18,43)
Ministry of Justice's District and Magistrate Courts	Enforce criminal laws related to child labor through 10 district courts and 30 magistrate courts. (4,11,42)
National Human Rights Commission	Receives complaints related to child labor, including its worst forms, and conducts investigations of human rights violations, including hereditary slavery. (4,42)

Niger's labor inspection agencies do not have the necessary funds, resources or staff to be able to carry out their duties in all regions, especially in the informal sector and in remote locations. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	57 (16)	60 (4)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (16)	Yes (4)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (16)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (16)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (16)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (16)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (16)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (16)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (16)	Yes (4)

During the reporting period, labor inspectors received training on child labor laws, in collaboration with the ILO and the Government of Germany. (4)

Despite an increase in the number of labor inspectors—from 57 to 60—the total number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Niger's workforce, which includes approximately 9.2 million workers. (4,16) According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed countries, Niger would need to employ about 231 labor inspectors. (44,45) During the reporting period, the government did not collect or publish general data on child labor or the worst forms of child labor, nor did it provide information on the number of inspections conducted, violations found, penalties imposed, and penalties collected. (4)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Niger 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 (16)	Yes (4)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (16)	N/A (4)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (16)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (16)	Unknown (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (16)	Yes (4)

Research found that inadequate resources, including insufficient personnel, funding, and training, hamper the capacity of criminal law enforcement authorities to coordinate and enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (2,4,46) The National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport (ANLTP/TIM) maintains and publicizes a hotline to report trafficking in persons crimes, but the number of calls received by the hotline that involve child trafficking is unknown. In addition, although the exact number of children removed from the worst forms of child labor is unavailable, removal of children from child labor occurs only in extreme cases of exploitation, such as child trafficking or forced labor, according to the Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Security. (4,47) The government did not provide information on investigations, violations, prosecutions, and convictions for inclusion in this report. (4)

Even though the Nigerien Supreme Court ruled the practice of *wahaya* to be illegal in 2019, reinforcing the 2003 Penal Code that prohibits this practice, research found enforcement to be negligible and that it is still common practice in some parts of the country. Research indicates that there was no evidence of efforts to raise awareness of this ruling during the reporting period. (13,14,16,34) In addition, a civil society organization specializing in assisting victims of hereditary slavery reported that most victims do not come forward or file complaints against their former masters due to a lack of reintegration services and dependency on their former masters. (8,13)

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 a lack of efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee to Combat Child and Forced Labor*	Formed by the government on September 14, 2021, the National Steering Committee to Combat Child and Forced Labor. Led by MELSS and includes 17 Nigerien ministries and agencies with the purpose of finalizing Niger's National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. (4,48) Intends to develop a new plan to eliminate child labor, including a hazardous work list. Replaces the National Steering Committee on Child Labor. (4,48)
National Commission to Coordinate Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport (CNCLTP/TIM)	Coordinates efforts to address human trafficking, and develops and implements policies and programs related to human trafficking. (3,4,19,36) Includes representatives from MELSS and civil society organizations. (31,49) During the reporting period, held six meeting sessions. (31)
National Committee to Combat Child Labor in Agriculture	Coordinates policies and programs to address child labor in agriculture. Chaired by the Ministry of Agriculture, includes representatives from MELSS, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection, and non-governmental stakeholders. (50) Research was unable to determine whether the National Committee to Combat Child Labor in Agriculture was active during the reporting period.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Child Protection Committees	Educate the public on the rights of children in order to limit abuses, including child labor. (13,51) Research was unable to determine whether the Child Protection Committees were active during the reporting period.
Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection	Works with law enforcement officials to provide vulnerable children with social and reintegration services, including education and counseling, in 54 Centers for Prevention, Promotion, and Protection across the country. (4,11,52,53) Research was unable to determine whether the Ministry for Promotion of Women and Child Protection was active during the reporting period.
National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport	Implements policies and programs developed by CNCLTP/TIM, conducts awareness campaigns about human trafficking, provides training and education to reduce the risk of human trafficking, and maintains a hotline to receive complaints concerning human trafficking. (3,4,49,54)

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

During the reporting period, the government took steps to formalize coordination efforts. (4) In November 2021, the government signed an MOU with Nigeria, formalizing and operationalizing cooperation agreements between law enforcement agencies in order to improve the two countries' collective response to trafficking in persons (TIP). The MOU will also implement awareness campaigns to educate populations on the risks of being targeted by traffickers. (31) Further, the ANLTP/TIM held multiple trainings on TIP issues, including child protection for judiciary, law enforcement, military, and civil society members, as well as international organization staff in 2021. Trainings were organized in collaboration with UNODC, ILO, and other organizations. (31) The ANLTP/TIM also held trainings on the implementation of the TIP National Referral Mechanism, which was enacted in 2019. (31)

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 a lack of coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2019–2023)	Aims to enhance the legal framework to prevent human trafficking, adequately implement the laws, and provide effective protection and care for victims, including children. Led by the National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport. (13,55,56) Continued to be implemented during the reporting period. (4)
Plan for Social and Economic Development (2017–2021)	Aims to promote sustainable development and social equality. Overseen by the Ministry of Planning. (19,57) Includes activities to improve access to education for vulnerable populations, especially migrant children, and to address street work and forced begging by children. (57) In 2021, the government developed a new Plan for Social and Economic Development for 2022–2026, which will place new emphasis on expanding education. Continued to be implemented during the reporting period. (4,8)
National Social Protection Strategy	Aims to improve the quality of, and access to, basic education and health services; includes strategies to address child labor. Overseen by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection. (18,58) Continued to be implemented during the reporting period. (4)
UN Development Assistance Framework (2019–2022)	Promotes improved access to education for vulnerable children and aims to build government capacity to address child labor. Operates under the direction of the Ministry of Planning and receives support from international donors. (2,59) Extended for an additional year into 2022. Continued to be implemented during the reporting period. (4)
Education and Training Sectorial Program (2014–2024)	Sets out a comprehensive map to improve the quality of, and access to, basic and higher education. Led by the Ministry of Education. (19,60) Continued to be implemented during the reporting period. (4)

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (19)

During the reporting period, the National Commission to Coordinate Efforts to Combat Trafficking in Persons drafted a new National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2022–2026), which aims to align Niger's laws to international standards, and is expected to be adopted in 2022. (31) In addition, the government formed the National Steering Committee to Combat Child and Forced Labor, which is expected to continue developing the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. The Plan, drafted in 2015, aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in Niger by 2025 but has not been adopted yet. (4,10)

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 of efforts to address the problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Centers for the Prevention, Protection, and Promotion of Persons†	Government program replacing the Judicial and Preventive Education Services, in collaboration with UNICEF, to provide food, shelter, education, and vocational training to street children, many of whom are victims of child labor. (1,52) In 2021, the program continued but research could not find information on activities or how many of the 54 existing centers continue to be open. (2,4,13,16,53)
Global Action Against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants	\$12.2 million EU-funded global project implemented by UNODC, UNICEF, and IOM to address human trafficking and migrant smuggling. (61,62) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Global Action Against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants program during the reporting period.
UNICEF Country Program (2019–2021)	UNICEF-funded program to support the government's efforts to improve children's education, birth registration rates, and social inclusion, and to strengthen child protection programs, including for children of refugees in the Diffa region. (63-65) The UNICEF Country Program was extended until 2022. (4)
USDOL-Funded Projects	USDOL-funded global projects implemented by ILO to support global and national efforts aimed at countering child labor and the forced labor of adults and children. Includes From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labor (The Bridge Project), to support global and national efforts aimed at addressing forced labor of adults and children under the 2014 ILO Protocol and supporting Recommendation to C.29 on Forced Labor, which has been extended through November 2022 with additional funding from ILO (4,66,67); and the Measurement, Awareness-Raising, and Policy Engagement (MAP 16) Project on Child Labor and Forced Labor (2019–March 2022), a \$200,000 program. (68) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.

† Program is funded by the Government of Niger.

Although Niger has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the problem, especially in agriculture, herding, mining, and caste-based servitude. Niger also lacks a specific program to assist children exploited by religious instructors. (2-4,46) In addition, the resources and facilities available to social services agencies remain inadequate. (2-4)

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 Niger (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law's minimum age for work provisions and protections apply to self-employed children and those in unpaid or non-contractual work.	2015 – 2021
	Establish a compulsory education age equal to the minimum age of employment.	2016 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that inspections and enforcement efforts take place in the informal sector, and in remote locations, where most child labor occurs.	2014 – 2021
	Publish complete information and data on child labor, including on the number of worksite inspections conducted, violations found, and penalties imposed and collected.	2012 – 2021
	Increase resources, including funding and training available to enforcement agencies, increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical guidance, and criminal investigators to provide adequate inspection coverage.	2009 – 2021
	Disaggregate complaints made to the National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport's hotline so that the number of complaints related to children is known.	2013 – 2021
	Ensure that victims of the worst forms of child labor are removed from exploitative situations as appropriate.	2010 – 2021
	Publish complete information on the number of criminal investigations, prosecutions, and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.	2020 – 2021
	Adequately enforce the Nigerian Supreme Court's ruling banning the practice of <i>wahaya</i> .	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that victims of slavery have access to reintegration services.	2020 – 2021

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2011 – 2021
Government Policies	Adopt and implement a national action plan to address child labor, including in hereditary slavery, mining, and agriculture.	2009 – 2021
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children, including girls, refugees, internally displaced children, and children in rural communities, by increasing school infrastructure, increasing the number of teachers, removing school fees, and providing more school supplies.	2013 – 2021
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the Global Action Against Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants program during the reporting period.	2020 – 2021
	Expand the scope of programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, herding, mining, and caste-based servitude.	2009 – 2021
	Implement a program to target and assist children exploited by religious instructors.	2011 – 2021
	Ensure that government social services providers have sufficient resources and facilities to provide the necessary care to all children withdrawn from hazardous and forced labor.	2015 – 2021

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