

In 2021, Suriname made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government drafted an annual plan to implement its National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor, which includes 21 action points, including the appointment of a Special Child Labor Rapporteur and capacity strengthening for the labor inspectorate. The Trafficking in Persons Working Group also drafted a victim-centered strategic plan and operations manual, which includes consideration for child survivors of human trafficking. Moreover, the government conducted an evaluation of Suriname's implementation of the United Nation's International Convention on the Rights of Children. However, children in Suriname are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. The compulsory education age does not reach the minimum age for employment, leaving some children vulnerable to labor exploitation. Suriname also lacked targeted inspections in risk-prone sectors.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Suriname are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1) Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining. (1-3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Suriname. 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	7.2 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	7.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		85.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (4)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018. (5)

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	Harvesting crops, applying pesticides,† carrying heavy loads† (6,7)
	Fishing, hunting, and forestry (8)
Industry	Mining, particularly gold mining (1,6,7)
	Construction,† including carrying heavy loads† (6-8)
	Wood processing, including carrying heavy loads† (2,9)
Services	Street work, including vending (7,8)
	Domestic work (8)
	Carrying luggage for airport passengers, including carrying heavy loads† (7)

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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 (1,6,7)

† 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 are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, including in informal mining camps in Suriname’s remote interior. (2,3,10,11) Throughout the coastal areas of Suriname, children work in agriculture, and in the capital of Paramaribo, they primarily engage in street vending. In addition, children, mostly boys, work carrying heavy loads in small-scale gold mines in the southeast region of the country, where they risk exposure to mercury and cyanide. (2,9-11) Children have also been reported to be working in small-scale construction and wood processing companies outside Paramaribo. (2,9) Migrant populations, especially those residing in the country illegally, are particularly vulnerable to both sex and labor trafficking, due to challenges associated with their precarious legal status. (12) Moreover, economic downturn has led to businesses closures and job losses, making children more vulnerable to trafficking as children are increasingly seeking work in order to support their families. (12)




Although Suriname’s net attendance percentage for primary school is high, it drops significantly for secondary school. Research indicates that there are disparities in education completion rates based on geographic and socioeconomic status, and that secondary school completion rates in the interior are as low as 15 percent. (13) Children from low-income households, particularly in the interior, face difficulties accessing education due to long distances to schools, transportation costs, and school fees. (1,7,14) Research also indicates that some LGBTQI+ students are bullied in schools. (15) In addition, children are sometimes forced to engage in commercial sexual exploitation in order to pay for educational expenses or to support their families. (16) Although children who are not citizens of Suriname can access free public education if they provide a birth certificate and vaccination records, there is limited reporting of instances in which children were denied access to education due to incomplete paperwork or their citizenship and residency status. These cases were reported among the Guyanese population in Suriname’s western border district, Nickerie, and the Brazilian population in Paramaribo. (7,17,18) Research suggests that families residing illegally in the country have also kept their children out of school to avoid being reported to authorities. (7)

The COVID-19 pandemic made access to education more complicated for low-income families, and costs of distance learning proved too expensive in the interior and for low-income families, particularly single-income households with multiple children. Schools in the interior did not engage in distance learning and did not develop adequate plans to ensure students caught up on materials and classes missed due to the pandemic. (7) These schools also faced additional closures due to teacher shortages. (7)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Suriname 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). However, gaps exist in Suriname's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of forced labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Articles 1 (j–l), 3, and 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act (19)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 1 (k and l) and 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act; Article 1 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth (19,20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 2 and 3 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth; Article 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act (19,20)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 334, 338, and 339 of the Penal Code; Article 15 of the Constitution; Article 1 of Law on Labor for Children and Young Persons (19,21,22)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 307 and 334 of the Penal Code (22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 291, 293, 297, 298, 303a, and 306 of the Penal Code (22)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 9 of the Conscription Act (23)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	12	Article 39 of the Constitution; Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education (21,24)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 38 and 39 of the Constitution (21)

* Country has no conscription (25)

The Constitution guarantees free public education for all citizens, and the September 2014 amendment to the Citizenship and Residency Law reaffirmed citizenship to children born in Suriname of foreign-born parents who would otherwise be stateless are nationals of Suriname. (21,26) Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education requires children to attend school until they are at least age 12. (24) This leaves children ages 12 to 16 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are no longer required to attend school, but are not yet legally permitted to work. For instance, while 96 percent of working children at the age of 14 are in school, at the age of 15 school attendance drops to 64 percent, and at age 16, it falls to 28 percent. (13)

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In December 2021, the Government of Suriname announced that an independent human rights consultant would evaluate Suriname's implementation of the UN's International Convention on the Rights of Children, which is an important step toward identifying a path forward in the implementation of the Convention. (7)

Suriname does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children because the use of a child under 16 for prostitution is not criminally prohibited. In addition, while the Penal Code establishes penalties for the production and trafficking of drugs, it does not appear to specifically prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child in the production and trafficking of drugs. (22)

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, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs (MOL)	Enforces laws related to child labor. (11) Reports suspected forced labor cases, including the worst forms of child labor, within 45 minutes of identification, to the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Unit of the Suriname Police Force. (9)
Suriname Police Force	Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. (11) Includes the Youth Affairs Police, who cover law enforcement involving children under age 18 and are jointly responsible for child labor-related crimes. Also includes the TIP Unit, which investigates reports and allegations of human trafficking and forced sexual exploitation nationwide, including cases involving children. (2,9,27)
Prosecutor's Office	Investigates and prosecutes human trafficking cases, and enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (9)
Bureau for the Rights of the Child of the Ministry of Social Affairs	Manages Suriname's reciprocal referral mechanism, which identifies services to children involved in child labor. (7) In 2021, raised awareness of issues related to children's rights through its Facebook page and managed the website of the Integrated Child Protection Network. Also continued piloting the referral system, which was developed in collaboration with UNICEF in 2019. (7)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Suriname took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including lack of targeted inspections in risk-prone sectors.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown (7)
Number of Labor Inspectors	50 (7)	50 (7)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (28)	Yes (28)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (2)	N/A (7)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	No (7)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	400 (2)	2,423 (7)
Number Conducted at Worksite	400 (2)	2,423 (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (2)	0 (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (2)	0 (7)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	2 (2)	0 (7)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (29)	Yes (29)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (7)

The Labor Inspectorate was placed at the head of a COVID-19 Cluster Team, a multi-organizational team with representatives from the Ministries of Labor, Health, Justice and Police, Regional Development and Sport, and Defense. Each representative was charged with inspecting a different aspect of pandemic protocols. (7) This effort provided the Labor Inspectorate with the opportunity to expand general inspections for labor law violations, and the high number of inspections for 2021 was largely accomplished through these COVID-19 Cluster Team inspections. (7)

Of the labor inspectors hired in 2020, 6 inspectors completed their basic training and were promoted to junior inspectors in 2021, while 11 inspectors are still in the process of completing basic training. Of the 50 labor inspectors, 25 have received special social inspection training, which includes additional focus on child labor issues. (7) The MOL noted that there is an insufficient number of labor inspectors to ensure the enforcement of labor laws in the informal sector, particularly in mining and agricultural areas, fisheries, and the country's interior. (11) However, all labor inspectors are trained and authorized to enforce child labor laws. (2,9,10) The Decree on Labor Inspection passed in 2017 gave the Labor Inspectorate more tools to adequately perform its functions and updated the legislation for a more developed labor market and new sectors. (7)

Although the MOL does not provide disaggregated funding information, the Labor Inspectorate reported that its funding is insufficient to adequately cover all sectors in the country, including the formal and informal sectors. In addition, high-risk sectors are not specifically targeted because labor inspectors mainly conduct routine inspections in the formal sectors, which have lower incidences of child labor. (2,7,10) High-risk sectors include the agricultural sector in the coastal area, and manufacturing companies and small construction enterprises on the outskirts of Paramaribo. Research indicates that child labor inspections are mostly conducted when cases are reported. (7) No inspections were reported in the artisanal gold mining sector in the interior of the country. (7) During the reporting period, inspections in and around Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport discovered young people from nearby villages who were between the ages of 10 and 15 on the airport grounds offering to carry luggage for passengers. This issue was discussed during the meeting of the Council of Ministers, but research did not discover what, if any, measures were taken. (7)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Suriname 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 lack of initial training for new criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (2)	No (7)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (2)	N/A (7)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Number of Investigations	0 (2)	2 (7)
Number of Violations Found	0 (2)	2 (7)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (2)	11 (7)
Number of Convictions	0 (2)	0 (7)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (2)	No (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (7)

Suriname's referral system, managed by the Bureau for the Rights of the Child of the Ministry of Social Affairs, was developed in collaboration with UNICEF in 2019 and is still in a pilot phase. (2) Reports from the referral mechanism are first filed with the police, who then pass on the complaint to the Labor Inspectorate or the Youth Affairs Police. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Social Affairs announced a full review of the referral mechanism with the assistance of UNICEF, as the mechanism is not sufficient to provide long-term solutions to child labor issues that are reported to it. (7)

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In 2021, there were two investigations involving commercial sexual exploitation of minor girls. The first case resulted in the arrest of 11 suspects, including 3 police officers, on various charges including human trafficking and sexual abuse of a minor. (7) The second case did not result in any charges and was referred to the Youth Affairs Police. The TIP Unit reported in 2021 that it removed three minor girls from situations of exploitation, two of whom were victims of sex trafficking, and referred them to counseling and other services. (7) One of the three girls was returned to her parents. (7)

The number of investigators is insufficient to respond to human trafficking cases, and, according to the Prosecutor's Office, investigations are initiated primarily as a result of complaints filed and are limited by a lack of resources, especially for travel to the interior of the country. (11,30,31) Resource constraints were made worse by the pandemic. (2) Suriname has a mechanism for the referral of victims for social services. In addition, the Bureau for Victim Services within the Ministry of Justice and Police provides counseling, the Bureau for Legal Services can provide a victim with legal assistance, and other services are arranged by the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Unit of the Suriname Police Force. (7)

The TIP Unit has 11 staff members who investigate human trafficking and human smuggling cases for the country. Initial investigations of trafficking are usually conducted by police who do not receive human trafficking training as part of their basic training. (7) Moreover, research finds that the government did not effectively identify trafficking in persons victims among children, migrants in the interior, and in brothels operating within private homes. (3) During the reporting period, the TIP Unit was appointed a new head and a strategic plan was drafted for the unit. This included descriptions of the functions and roles of staff in the unit and an analysis that identified barriers to optimal functioning of the department. (12) Lack of funding and resources were identified as the greatest problems facing the unit. The strategic plan further identified the training needs of the unit. (12)

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 Commission on Combating Child Labor	Serves as the leading body in drafting child labor policies. (10) Coordinates and monitors efforts to address child labor, including the execution of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. Also coordinates with the Integrated Child Protection Network to maximize awareness-raising efforts. (9) Mandate was renewed in August 2021 and is valid through December 2023. (7) Adopted a new National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor during the reporting period that includes the appointment of a Special Child Labor Rapporteur and capacity strengthening of the Labor Inspectorate. (7)
Trafficking in Persons Working Group	Coordinates the government's anti-human trafficking efforts. Provides care to survivors of human trafficking through government-supported NGOs. (30) Comprises nine government agencies, including organizations that target the worst forms of child labor. (11) In 2021, updated its annual national action plan. As part of the working group, the TIP Unit of the Suriname Police Force also drafted its own strategic plan, which serves primarily as an operations manual for the unit and features a victim-centered approach, including toward child victims of human trafficking. (7)
Integrated Child Protection Network	Prevents child abuse, neglect, and exploitation, including child labor. Led by the Ministry of Social Affairs, includes the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Police, Office of the First Lady, National Assembly, and NGO stakeholders, with support from UNICEF. (11) In 2021, approved the establishment of a Sub-Council designed to simplify the process of approving policies related to child protection. The Sub-Council includes representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Justice, and Police and the MOL. (7)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor (2019–2024)	Aims to address child labor by removing children from child labor and by addressing issues that lead children to become involved in child labor, including poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Also addresses the social and educational reintegration of these children. (9) During the reporting period, drafted an annual plan for 2021–2022, which identifies 21 activities that the National Commission on Combating Child Labor intends to work on through the end of 2022. (7)
National Action Plan for the Prevention and Response to Trafficking in Persons (2021–2022)†	Aims to address and prevent human trafficking, including through prevention, detection and investigation, criminal prosecution, and victim support and rehabilitation. (7,32) During the reporting period, the Annual National Action Plan was updated. Activities included in the plan have a combined budget of \$114,000. (7)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

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 a lack of services for child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Decent Work Program	ILO program that supports capacity building of the Labor Inspectorate and constituents, as well as of the National Commission on Combating Child Labor for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the National Action Plan. (33) During the reporting period, the program published and reported on findings related to creating an enabling business environment and improving productivity. (34)
My Line (<i>Mi Lijn</i>)†	Government-run, 24-hour hotline that provides confidential advice to children in need, including victims of the worst forms of child labor, victims of domestic violence, and persons in need of mental support. Research indicates a significant increase in calls to the hotline during the reporting period. (7)
Anti-Trafficking Hotline†	Government-sponsored hotline that allows citizens to provide information to the police about human trafficking cases. (9) Reported to be active in 2021, though no calls related to human trafficking were reported. (7)
Second Basic Education Improvement Program (2015–2040)	Inter-American Development Bank-funded \$20 million, 25-year loan implemented by the Ministry of Education to develop curriculums and textbooks, provide teacher training, renovate classrooms, build housing for teachers in the interior, and build a center for teacher training and professional development. (7,35) Phase Two of the program, which mostly focused on writing and producing new school curriculums, concluded in 2021. (7)
Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor	ILO and Cooperation Agency of Brazil program to improve youth transition from school to work in Caribbean countries, including Suriname. (36) During the reporting period, the Initiative participated in a virtual event with other Caribbean countries to raise awareness about child labor on social media platforms. (37)

† Program is funded by the Government of Suriname.

The government continues to support initiatives to eradicate child labor, but existing social programs are inadequate to fully address the problem. (11) In particular, Suriname lacks programs to assist child victims of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. (38)

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 Suriname (Table 11).

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2021
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2021
	Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the use of a child under 16 for prostitution.	2021
	Increase the compulsory education age to at least age 16, the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2021
	Ratify the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2020 – 2021
Enforcement	Publish information on Labor Inspectorate funding.	2012 – 2021
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate and the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force are sufficiently funded and adequately staffed to cover labor inspections in both the formal and informal sectors of the labor force, including in risk-prone sectors, such as in fisheries, mining, and agricultural areas in which child labor is likely to occur, particularly in the interior of the country.	2014 – 2021
	Provide training on the worst forms of child labor, including on identification of trafficking in persons, to new criminal investigators and to the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force.	2021
	Ensure that labor inspectors adequately carry out their mandate and address child labor when identified in all sectors, including at Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport.	2021
	Ensure the child labor referral system can adequately provide long-term solutions to child labor issues that are reported to it.	2021
Social Programs	Develop social programs to prevent and eradicate child labor in agriculture and mining and to improve secondary school attendance, particularly in the interior.	2015 – 2021
	Strengthen social services to assist child victims of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.	2014 – 2021
	Increase access to education by eliminating school-related fees, reducing transportation costs, increasing access to schools in remote locations, and removing requirements for documentation.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that all children, including children of foreign-born parents, have access to free public education regardless of citizenship and residency status, and that school registration is not used to report families without proper residential status.	2021
	Address issues of bullying in schools, including for LGBTQI+ students.	2021

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