

In 2022, Benin made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government of Benin provided criminal law enforcement data on investigations and prosecutions concerning the worst forms of child labor for publication in this report. The government also renewed and contributed funding to the Integrated National School Feeding Program, which provides meals at 75 percent of Benin's schools. Finally, labor inspectors, social workers, and judicial police officers received training from the Directorate General of Labor on standard operating procedures for child labor cases. However, children in Benin are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in the production of cotton and crushed granite. Children also perform dangerous tasks in domestic work and street vending. There are many barriers to education, especially for children with disabilities. In addition, inadequate funding for the labor inspectorate may impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Benin. 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	24.7 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	67.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	16.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		73.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2017–2018. (2)

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 cotton, including exposure to pesticides† (3,4)
	Capturing,† cleaning, and descaling fish (4,5)
	Raising livestock† (4,5)
Industry	Washing† and sieving† in gold mining and lifting heaving objects, and collecting,† crushing,† and sieving stones† for gravel and granite quarrying (4,6-9)
	Construction, including working at elevated heights, carrying materials, breaking rocks, and welding (4)
Services	Domestic work† (4,7,10)
	Working in the transportation industry† (4)
	Street work, including vending and begging (4,10-12)
	Dressmaking† and carpentry† (5)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor†	Working in restaurants and bars (4)
	Forced labor in granite quarrying, domestic work, vending, handicraft activities, and agriculture, including in the production of cotton (3,4,6-8,10-15)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking; selling smuggled gasoline on roadsides; and illegally selling alcohol, cigarettes, and pharmaceutical products on the street (4)

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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‡	Forced begging (4,15) Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and use in the production of pornography (4,7,13,15-17)

† 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.




Child trafficking occurs mostly within Benin, but it also occurs to other countries, primarily Gabon, Togo, Nigeria, Niger, and the Republic of the Congo, for purposes of domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and work in vending, agriculture, and mining. (4,7,15,18-21) Within Benin, child trafficking primarily occurs for forced labor. (4,15) Children living in the northern regions of Benin are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking to urban regions in southern Benin. (15,17) Reports also indicate that children living in the lakeside areas of southeastern Benin, including the commune of So Ava, are sometimes subjected to debt bondage. (4,15,17) Children work below the minimum age in the production of cotton, Benin's top export crop, and they are sometimes exposed to dangerous pesticides. (3,4,18) Furthermore, children are subjected to hazardous labor, and at times forced labor, in granite quarrying. (6) Children working at quarries break stones, dig sand and gravel, work at elevated heights, use construction equipment, and are exposed to dust. (4) Traditionally, under a practice known locally as *vidomègon*, children live with relatives or family friends and perform household services in exchange for educational opportunities. A majority of these children are girls, and many are subjected to labor exploitation and sexual abuse. (4,7,10,15,19,22)

In Benin, primary education is free and compulsory for all children between ages 6 and 11, and secondary education is free for girls through grade nine. (23) While boys and girls attend primary school at roughly the same rates, boys complete secondary school at a higher rate than girls. (23,24) Evidence suggests that incidences of abuse in school, including corporal punishment (outlawed in 2015), sexual harassment, and sexual abuse by teachers in exchange for better grades, continue to hamper educational access, especially for girls. (4,13,16,18) Inadequate toilets and sanitation facilities, as well as lack of access to menstruation education and products, are further barriers to girls’ education. (4,20) In Benin, other barriers to education include the need to travel long distances, insufficient numbers of teachers, and inadequate access for students with disabilities. (18,25) To address the latter, the government runs 20 specialty schools in the country, but access is limited in rural areas. (4,18) In rural areas, sometimes children do not have birth certificates due to the costs and parents’ limited understanding of birth registration procedures. Children without documentation may be denied access to education, leaving them more vulnerable to child labor. (16,18,23)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Benin 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 Benin's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of free public basic education guaranteed by law.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Articles 166 and 301 of the Labor Code; Article 210 of the Child Code (26,27)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 210 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 1 of the Hazardous Occupations List (27,28)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Hazardous Occupations List (28)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (26,27,29)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 2–4, 6, 15, 16, 18, and 21–25 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 201, 212, 352, and 353 of the Child Code; Articles 499–501 and 504 of the Penal Code (27,29,30)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3 of the Law on the Prevention and Repression of Violence Against Women; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 212 and 378 of the Child Code; Article 504 of the Penal Code (27,29-31)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (27,29)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 6 of Law 2005-43 (32)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Article 6 of Law 2005-43; Title II, Article 32 of the Constitution (32,33)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 2 and 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (29)
Compulsory Education Age	No	11‡	Article 24 of Act N° 2003-17; Article 113 of the Child Code (27,34)
Free Public Education	No		Article 13 of the Constitution; Article 114 of the Child Code; Article 24 of Act N° 2003-17 (27,33,34)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (23,34)

Children in Benin are required to attend primary school, which lasts 6 years and typically ends at age 11. This standard makes children ages 11 through 14 vulnerable to child labor as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. (26,27,34) In addition, while the law provides free primary education to all children, basic education through the lower secondary level is not guaranteed by law, which may increase the risk of children's vulnerability to child labor. (27,33,34)

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.

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (MOLCS)	Enforces child labor laws and investigates labor code infractions. (18) Coordinates the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (<i>Comité Directeur National de Lutte Contre le Travail des Enfants</i>). (4)
Ministry of the Interior and Public Security	Enforces criminal laws related to the protection of minors, including the worst forms of child labor and child trafficking, through the Central Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking (OCPM). (4,13,15,17) Maintains a child trafficking database—Benin's Children (<i>Enfants du Benin</i>)—to track and process child trafficking cases. (19) Coordinates with MOLCS to inspect labor code infractions related to child labor, and coordinates with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance to provide assistance to survivors of labor exploitation. (4) Through OCPM's vice squad (<i>Brigade des Moeurs</i>), addresses child trafficking for sexual exploitation. (4,15)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (MOLCS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including restrictions on inspections in agriculture.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$189,000 (18)	\$108,000 (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	35 (35)	72 (4)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (26)	Yes (26)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	No (18)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	1,015 (20)	953 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	620 (20)	104 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (18)	27 (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (18)	0 (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (18)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (18)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (26)	Yes (26)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (18)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (18)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (18)	Yes (4)

In 2022, the government increased the overall funding for the Ministry of Labor's Directorate of Labor to \$264,000, of which \$108,000 was reserved for the labor inspectorate. Of Benin's 72 labor inspectors, 29 are dedicated to conducting child labor inspections. (4) Labor inspectors, social workers, and judicial police officers received training from the General Directorate of Labor on standard operating procedures for child labor cases. The labor inspectorate targeted inspections in several sectors in which children work, including open-air markets, workshops, mines, quarries, and construction worksites. (4) MOLCS claims that it is not permitted to conduct labor inspections in agriculture due to the lack of an interministerial decree from the Ministry of Agriculture. The labor code, by contrast, allows labor inspectors to freely enter any workplace to carry out investigations, and it requires all civil authorities to collaborate with labor officials to facilitate inspections. (9,18,26,35) This gap between law and practice means that no inspections are carried out in agriculture, a sector in which child labor is known to be present. (9,18,35) In addition, no labor inspections occurred in several other sectors where children are known to work, including fishing, domestic work, and gold mining. (4)

Labor inspections are conducted via committee and require the presence of labor inspectors, police officers, and social workers. In practice, research suggests that these requirements create logistical challenges to the labor inspection process. (18) In prior years, the labor inspectorate lacked sufficient transportation to conduct regular inspections, but in 2022, the government provided some motorcycles for department-level labor inspectors to complete their work. (4) MOLCS estimated that its budget allocation still meets less than 10 percent of its needs. (4) Research also indicates that Benin does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry

out their mandated duties. (4,36,37) In addition to child labor violations found through the labor inspectorate, the Ministry of Social Affairs reported identifying 575 violations of child labor laws and 517 cases of child trafficking. (4)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (18)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (18)	108 (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (18)	49 (4)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (18)	38 (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (18)	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (18)	Yes (4)

In 2022, for the first time in several years, Benin provided for publication criminal law enforcement data on cases related to the worst forms of child labor. (4) The government has a mechanism to enable criminal authorities and social services to reciprocally refer children found in the worst forms of child labor and human trafficking, and social workers regularly refer cases. (4,15) The government also runs a child assistance hotline, which takes anonymous tips and is staffed 24 hours a day by French and local language speakers. Tips involving child trafficking and child labor are referred to social services and criminal authorities. (4,13,17) In 2022, the hotline received 44 calls related to child trafficking, and these calls were referred to police and/or social workers. (15) The government also held three training classes in 2022 for police officers, brigadiers, and commissions on child protection. (15) In addition, criminal law enforcement officers received initial training on child labor and child trafficking as part of the National Police Academy's curriculum, but the government and UNICEF have assessed the training as insufficient. (4)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established a key mechanism 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 coordination among agencies.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (<i>Comité Directeur National de Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants</i>)	Coordinates efforts to address child labor. Falls under the jurisdiction of MOLCS and includes delegates from UNICEF, trade unions, local NGOs, and other government ministries. (4,13,18) Continued to implement the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor during the reporting period. (4)

In addition to the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor, the National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Technical Commission also have mandates to coordinate government-wide efforts to address child trafficking. (4,15,17) Research found that there is a lack of effective coordination among agencies responsible for addressing the needs of vulnerable children, partially due to a lack of clarity regarding institutional mandates and gaps in communication regarding child labor data. (4,18)

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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 insufficient incorporation of child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Education Sector Plan.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2019–2023)	Aims to reduce the worst forms of child labor in Benin by 70 percent by the end of 2023. Targets six focus areas: (1) strengthening the legislative and institutional framework related to child labor; (2) information, awareness, and social mobilization; (3) education and training; (4) victim monitoring, protection, and referral; (5) inspection and suppression; and (6) institutional mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation of the plan. (13,38) Includes a vocational education program focused on formalizing and regulating apprenticeships for children. (20) The government continued to implement this policy during the reporting period. (4)
Cooperative Agreement to Combat Cross-Border Trafficking	Outlines a tripartite cooperative agreement among the Governments of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo committing to cooperate and assist each other in the investigation of human trafficking offenses, including child trafficking. (22) In December 2022, Benin cooperated with the Governments of Burkina Faso and Togo, as well as that of Côte d'Ivoire, on a joint operation that resulted in the arrest of 15 suspected traffickers and the release and reintegration of 90 child trafficking survivors. (15)
National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons (2020–2024)	Aims to eradicate trafficking in persons, including child trafficking, by strengthening governmental systems and institutional frameworks. (17,39) The government indicates that inadequate resources were dedicated to the National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons. (15,17) During the reporting period, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Technical Commission coordinated data collection on trafficking across various government ministries and agencies, and began planning a Trafficking in Persons National Information System. (15)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, 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 inadequate efforts to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Government-Funded Shelters and Retraining Centers†	Shelters and centers that provide social services to survivors of child labor and child trafficking. Includes an OCPM-operated interim care facility for children rescued from child trafficking or labor exploitation, which has capacity for 160 children and provides housing, medical, legal, and psychological services. (4,15,17,18,40) In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance operates Social Promotion Centers which provide social services to child trafficking survivors in all of Benin's 77 communes. There is also a MOLCS-run vocational school program that, with the assistance of UNICEF, provides training in trades to survivors of child trafficking. (4,15,17,18,40) During the reporting year, OCPM's interim care facility and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance's Social Promotion Centers continued to provide services to child survivors in cooperation with labor and criminal law enforcement. (4)
Integrated National School Feeding Program (2022–2026)†	\$31.7 million program funded by the Government of Benin and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. Implemented by WFP and Catholic Relief Services. (4,41) Covers 75 percent of schools in Benin and aims to improve school retention and reduce hunger. In 2022, the program was renewed and the Government of Benin contributed funding. (4,41)
Administrative Census for Population Identification†	Program to identify and register citizens lacking identity documents; collect personal data on Beninese citizens, including newborns; and issue national biometric identification cards that can be used for civil and administrative purposes. (4) The program continued to register citizens, including children, in 2022. (4)

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† Program is funded by the Government of Benin.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (4,18)

Although the Government of Benin has implemented programs to protect children from human trafficking, research was unable to determine whether the government has implemented programs to assist children engaged in other worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, mining and quarrying, and agriculture. (18)

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 Benin (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Establish by law free basic public education, including lower secondary education.	2021 – 2022
	Raise the minimum age for compulsory education from age 11 to age 14 so it is consistent with the minimum age for admission to work.	2021 – 2022
Enforcement	Provide adequate training for labor inspectors and criminal law enforcement officials.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate receives adequate funding, including for transportation, to carry out its mandate.	2009 – 2022
	Improve coordination between the labor inspectorate, social workers, and police officers in the planning and execution of labor inspections.	2021 – 2022
	Allow the labor inspectorate to freely conduct inspections in the agriculture sector.	2021 – 2022
	Expand labor inspections in sectors with a high prevalence of child labor, including mining and quarrying, fishing, and domestic work.	2019 – 2022
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 72 to 120 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 4.8 million people.	2015 – 2022
	Publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts, including penalties imposed.	2009 – 2022
Coordination	Ensure effective coordination among agencies, including by clarifying institutional mandates and improving communication regarding the collection and sharing of data.	2019 – 2022
Government Policies	Dedicate adequate resources to support the implementation of all policies related to child labor and child trafficking, including the National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons.	2010 – 2022
Social Programs	Increase access to education by ensuring the safety of children, especially girls, in schools, providing access to sanitation facilities and feminine hygiene products, ensuring accommodations in schools for children with disabilities, providing reliable transportation to schools, improving school infrastructure, and increasing birth registration rates.	2010 – 2022
	Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, agriculture, mining and quarrying; and monitor and report annually on the progress of these programs.	2010 – 2022

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