

In 2022, Gabon made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government worked with the United Nations Children's Fund on a campaign to provide birth certificates to more than 10,000 children, and increased funding, bed capacity, and in-kind support for shelters. However, despite government initiatives to address child labor, Gabon is receiving an assessment of minimal advancement because it continued to implement a practice that delayed advancement to eliminate child labor. The government failed to provide evidence it conducted worksite inspections during the reporting period. Labor inspections are a key tool for identifying child labor violations, and their absence makes children more vulnerable to child labor. Children in Gabon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work.



Furthermore, Gabonese law regarding minimum age for work provisions only applies to children in formal employment relationships, which does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age for work. In addition, Gabon does not have a policy that addresses all relevant forms of child labor and lacks social programs to address child labor in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation.

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

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Gabon.

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

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	22.3 (83,073)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	94.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	23.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		78.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Deuxième Enquête Démographique et de Santé au Gabon (EDSG-II), 2012. (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	Fishing, including the production and sale of smoked fish (3-6)
Industry	Working in sand quarries† (3,5-7)
	Working in brick factories (3,5,6)
Services	Domestic work (3,5,6,8)
	Street vending, including windshield cleaning, cleaning market spaces at night, and carrying heavy loads† (3,4,6,8)
	Garbage scavenging (3,5,6)
	Working in transportation, including minibuses,† and as mechanics (3,6,7)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in markets, restaurants, handicraft shops, sand quarries, gold mines, farming, animal husbandry, fishing, domestic work, begging, and as mechanics (6,9)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,5,8,10)

† 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.

# Gabon

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT




Gabon is primarily a destination and transit country for victims of child trafficking from other countries in Central and West Africa. (3,6,11,12) Some families entrust their children to intermediaries who promise education and safe work opportunities; instead, these children are sometimes subjected to child trafficking for labor exploitation. (11) There are reports that child victims of forced labor mainly work in the informal sector as street vendors, often selling beauty products and fruits. Boys also often work in fishing, microbus transportation, mechanics shops, and cleaning market spaces after they have closed. (3,4,6,13) In addition, reports indicate that West African human traffickers exploit children from their countries of origin to work in Libreville markets and in other urban centers, including Port-Gentil. (1,3,13)

Although the Law on General Education guarantees the right to free and compulsory education, in practice, students must pay for school fees, which may be prohibitive. (5,14) Due to a lack of teachers and poor school infrastructure, education beyond primary school is often unavailable in rural areas. (3,6,15) In addition, children living in remote areas may not receive birth certificates, which are often required for school enrollment, and children who do not attend school are more vulnerable to child labor. (3,6,15) In 2022, as part of the Citizenship and Social Protection program conducted in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Gabonese Ministry of Social Affairs and Women's Rights delivered birth certificates to 10,196 children in the Estuaire Province. (16)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Gabon has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

**Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor**

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Gabon's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	16	Article 177 of the Labor Code; Article 2 of the Decree N° 0651/PR/MTEPS on Establishing Individual Exceptions to the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (17-19)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of the Hazardous Work List (17,18,20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 2, 3, and 5 of the Hazardous Work List (17,18,20)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 225 to 225-7 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code; Articles 3, 12, and 13 of Law N° 09/04 Preventing and Fighting Against Child Trafficking; Article 4 of the Labor Code (17,21,22)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 3, 11–14, and 20 of Law N° 09/04 Preventing and Fighting Against Child Trafficking; Articles 225 to 225-7 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code (21,22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 260, 261, and 263 of the Penal Code; Articles 225 to 225-7 and Articles 281-3 to 281-5 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code (22,23)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 281-1 of Gabon's 2020 Revised Penal Code (22)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 17 of the Law on the Organization of National Defense and Public Security (24)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes*		Article 17 of the Law on the Organization of National Defense and Public Security (24)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 1 of the Constitution; Article 2 of Act N° 21/2011 on General Education; Article 340-6 of the Revised 2020 Penal Code (14,22,25)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 1.18 and 1.19 of the Constitution; Article 2 of Act N° 21/2011 on General Education (14,25)

\* Country has no conscription (9)

Although the Labor Code prohibits work by children under age 16, minimum age protections do not apply to children outside of formal work relationships, which does not conform to international standards that require all children be protected under the law. (17,21,22,26) In addition, Gabon's light work provision permits children under age 16 to perform light work with parental permission, but it does not set a minimum age, determine the activities in which light work may be permitted, prescribe the number of hours per week for light work, or specify the conditions in which light work may be undertaken. (19)

### 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, the absence of worksite inspections conducted at the national level in Gabon may impede the enforcement of child labor laws.

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

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Employment, Public Function, Labor and Professional Training	Receives, investigates, and addresses child labor complaints. (6,15)
Ministry of the Interior's Police Force	Enforces laws, investigates violations of the worst forms of child labor, and refers cases to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution. (3,15) Refers survivors of child trafficking to the Ministry of Social Affairs, which assists vulnerable children by operating shelters, and facilitating their repatriation or resettlement processes. (3,13)
Ministry of Justice	Enforces child labor laws by prosecuting child labor cases. Coordinates the activities of agencies responsible for enforcing criminal laws against forced child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. (3) Assists in supporting victims of child trafficking while prosecutors and investigators prepare their cases. (3,7)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2022, the absence of worksite inspections conducted at the national level in Gabon may have impeded the enforcement of child labor laws. (Table 6)

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (3)	Unknown (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown (3)	Unknown (6)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (17)	Yes (17)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	No (3)	No (6)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	0 (3)	0 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (3)	N/A (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (3)	N/A (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (3)	N/A (6)
Routine Inspections Conducted	N/A (3)	N/A (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	N/A (3)	N/A (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (17)	Yes (17)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	No (3)	No (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (6)

The government failed to provide evidence it conducted worksite inspections during the reporting period. (6) Labor inspections are a key tool for identifying child labor violations, and their absence makes children more vulnerable to child labor. The government also did not provide information on labor inspectorate funding, or the number of labor inspectors. (6) While the number of labor inspectors is unknown, research suggests that Gabon does not have an adequate number of inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (6,27,28) In addition, research indicates that inadequate resources—including training for inspectors, transportation, and fuel—may have hampered the labor inspectorate's capacity to adequately conduct inspections, and enforce labor laws throughout the country. (3,6,13,15) Labor inspectors in Gabon are also responsible for reconciling labor disputes, which may detract from their primary duty of inspection. (17)

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

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

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

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (3)	Yes (9)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (3)	Unknown (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (3)	Unknown (6)
Number of Convictions	6 (3,29)	10 (6,9)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (3,29)	Yes (6,9)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (6)

The government did not provide information on the number of investigations conducted or the number of prosecutions initiated for inclusion in this report. However, during the reporting period, approximately 20 children received support from social services after being identified as alleged victims of child labor violations by NGOs or during other government inspections. (6,9) The government convicted 3 individuals on child trafficking charges, including a Togolese national, issuing prison sentences of 8 to 10 years. (9,30) In June

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2022, the government provided capacity-building training on trafficking in persons to magistrates, which was organized by the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF. (31) Also in 2022, representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Women's Rights, the Ministry of Health, Social Protection and National Solidarity (MSPNS), as well as NGO representatives, worked together on an informal basis to identify cases of exploitative child labor. (6) Research indicates that other coordinating committees exist, but lack sufficient funding and members sometimes use their personal funds to support human trafficking survivors. (5,7,32)

Despite these efforts, research has shown that a lack of resources, including transportation, access to fuel, insufficient training, infrequent convening of the Criminal Court, a backlog of cases, and weak coordination among enforcement agencies hampered criminal enforcement efforts. In addition, evidence indicates that some child trafficking perpetrators falsified documents to make victims appear older than age 18 to avoid punishment under Gabon's child trafficking laws. (5,8,13,29,31)

### 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 sufficient infrastructure and staff.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Observatory of the Rights of the Child (ONDE)	Coordinates the implementation of the UN CRC, including the promotion of children's rights to education, and protection against all forms of exploitation and abuse. Establishes and oversees committees to protect children's rights in all provinces. (3,33) Serves as a mechanism for cooperation and consultation between private and public sector actors who work on the rights of the child. Coordination efforts are limited due to the lack of an ONDE office and limited staff. (33) The Observatory was inactive during the reporting period. (9)

Although the National Observatory of the Rights of the Child exists, research found no evidence that the committee functions as a coordinating mechanism to address all forms of child labor.

### V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

Research found no evidence that the government has active policies to address child labor. (9)

Although Gabon has a National Youth Policy, child labor elimination and prevention strategies have not been integrated into it. (34) In 2022, the government signed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperative Framework (UNSDCF) 2023–2027 for Gabon. The new Cooperative Framework includes the aim of improving access to education, which helps reduce vulnerability to child labor. (35)

### VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to preventing child labor (Table 9). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

**Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description & Activities
Shelters for Children in Need	Provide social services to survivors of child trafficking. The government provides support to shelters run by civil society organizations. (7,12,13,36) Victims receive medical care, literacy training, and reintegration support. (3,7) During the reporting period the government increased funding for shelters by 50 percent. The government specifically expanded support for the Angondjé shelter, in partnership with local NGOs, facilitating an increase in bed capacity for child trafficking survivors from 80 to 120. (6,31) Additionally, the government promoted capacity building among individuals who provide physiotherapy, and speech therapy to children with special needs. (6) However, research indicates that shelter space is still insufficient to accommodate all survivors of human trafficking as well as other vulnerable children due to inadequate funding. (3,5,7,10)

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

Research found no evidence of a government program that aims to address child labor in domestic work or commercial sexual exploitation. (5,7)

## VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Gabon (Table 10).

**Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that minimum age protections are extended to children working outside of formal employment relationships.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that the legal framework for light work establishes a minimum age no younger than age 13, determines activities that are considered light work, and specifies the conditions under which light work may be undertaken.	2013 – 2022
	Establish criminal prohibitions for the recruitment of children under age 18 for use in armed conflict by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
Enforcement	Publish information on the funding level for the labor inspectorate and number of labor inspectors, and ensure both labor inspectors and criminal investigators receive adequate funding, training, transportation, and fuel to carry out inspections and investigations.	2009 – 2022
	Employ at least 48 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage for the labor force of approximately 725,000 people.	2022
	Conduct worksite inspections, including routine and unannounced inspections and in both the formal and informal sectors, to identify child labor violations.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors are not tasked with conciliation or arbitration duties so that they can carry out their primary duties of inspection and monitoring throughout the country.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the government conducts an adequate number of labor inspections and criminal investigations into alleged child labor crimes and publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement bodies, including the courts, have sufficient resources to investigate, prosecute, and impose penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2022
	Ensure that the National Observatory of the Rights of the Child remains active and functions as a coordinating mechanism to address all forms of child labor and report on its activities.	2013 – 2022
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, including forced labor and commercial sexual exploitation.	2015 – 2022
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into policies that aim to address child labor.	2014 – 2022
Social Programs	Ensure that children have access to education by eliminating school fees, increasing the number of teachers and schools in rural areas, and expanding efforts to provide all children with birth registration.	2010 – 2022
	Expand programs to address the scope of the country's child labor problem, including in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation.	2010 – 2022
	Ensure that the government continues to provide adequate support to survivors of child labor, including sufficient shelter space for survivors.	2010 – 2022

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