

In 2022, Jamaica made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security increased the number of labor inspections from 1,679 in 2021 to 2,319 in 2022. It also drafted a new policy to reduce child labor through 2027 that awaits Cabinet approval. In addition, the Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons signed a cooperation agreement with government departments and NGOs to collect and report national human trafficking data. However, children in Jamaica are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and use in illicit activities. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture and street work. Jamaica's laws do not provide higher penalties for using, procuring, or offering children for the production and distribution of drugs than penalties imposed for these same crimes when the victims are adults. Moreover, the law providing for free basic education does not meet international standards because free education is only guaranteed for Jamaican citizens.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

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

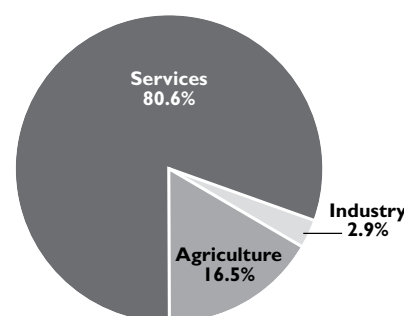
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	6.2 (30,111)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	98.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	7.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		85.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Jamaica Youth Activity Survey (SIMPOC), 2016. (2)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



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	Farming,† activities unknown (3,4) Fishing, activities unknown (3)
Industry	Construction (3)
Services	Working in shops and markets (4,5) Domestic work (4,5) Street work, including begging‡ and vending (4-6) Wholesale and retail (3)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,7,8) Forced domestic work (4,6,7) Use in illicit activities, including executing financial scams, recruitment into criminal organizations, and serving as drug and gun couriers (4,5,7) Forced begging (4) Forced work in shops and markets (4)

† 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.

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Children in rural areas are more likely to work than their urban counterparts; they are also more likely to work longer hours and to engage in hazardous work. (3) Some young boys and girls from rural areas who are sent to live with more affluent family members or acquaintances become victims of forced labor in private households, markets, and shops. (4) Some children from Jamaica are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, particularly in or near the tourist attractions of Negril, Montego Bay, and certain urban areas of Kingston. (4,5) Cases may involve girls from poor urban and rural households trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in brothels, nightclubs, massage parlors, and strip clubs. Recently, victims have been lured by traffickers who advertise false jobs on social media or in newspapers. (4,5,9) Girls, immigrant children, LGBTQI+ youth, children from poor families, and children from rural areas are particularly vulnerable to sex trafficking. (4,8,10,11) Of the LGBTQI+ youth exploited in commercial sex, many were children fleeing their families or communities in fear of persecution or bullying. (4) Children also continue to be recruited by criminal organizations to engage in illicit activities, such as gang violence, drug and gun smuggling, and financial fraud, including lottery scamming when criminals contact victims abroad and allege a processing fee must be paid to claim a large cash prize. (4,7,8,11) In 2022, the suspected perpetrators in child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation cases identified by authorities were most often family members or other caretakers of the victim. (4,9)

The cost for transportation, food, books, and uniforms creates barriers to education for some children. (12) Although the Jamaican government has unified all post-primary schools, an unofficial division remains and government officials and education professionals in Jamaica reported a significant divide between traditional high schools and non-traditional secondary schools, in which the latter purportedly left students without adequate education, training, and certification, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. (4,5,9) While access to primary education is guaranteed, reports indicate that some children with disabilities received no education, particularly in rural areas without adequate transportation and facilities, or when parents chose not to send their children. (4,9) Truancy officers in Jamaica have not been active for several years. (9) In late 2021, UNICEF reported that schools lost contact with approximately 120,000 Jamaican students due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. (4,8) As of December 2022, over 3,000 students remained unaccounted for and are believed to have started working or become involved in criminal activities. (4,8)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Jamaica 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 Jamaica's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including failure to sufficiently criminalize the use of children in illicit activities.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	15	Articles 34(1) and 36 of the Child Care and Protection Act (13)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 34(3) and 36 of the Child Care and Protection Act (13)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 34(3)(b), 39, and 41 of the Child Care and Protection Act; Section 55 of the Factories Act: Docks (Safety, Health and Welfare) Regulations; Section 49(2) of the Factories Act: Building Operations and Works of Engineering Construction Regulations; Section 18 of the Mining Act (13-16)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 2, 4(1)(a), and 4(2)–4(9) of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment) Act; Section 2 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment (Amendment) Act, 2021 (17,18)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Section 10 of the Child Care and Protection Act; Sections 2, 4, and 4A of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment) Act; Section 2 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment (Amendment) Act, 2021 (13,17,18)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 2, 4, and 4A of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Suppression and Punishment) Act; Sections 18, 21, and 36 of the Sexual Offences Act; Sections 3 and 4 of the Child Pornography (Prevention) Act (17-20)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 4 of the Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organizations) Act (21)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Section 18(2) of the Defense Act (22)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Sections 28 and 89 of the Child Care and Protection Act (13)
Free Public Education	No		Section 13(k) of the Jamaican Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (23)

* Country has no conscription (17)

Jamaica allows children ages 13 to 14 to engage in light work but has not determined the specific light work activities and hours permissible to facilitate enforcement. (5,13) Jamaica also does not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children because the law does not specifically criminalize the use of a child for prostitution. (17-20) In addition, the laws related to the use of children in illicit activities do not specifically include higher penalties for perpetrators who use, procure, or offer a child for the production and distribution of drugs. (13,24) Furthermore, the law does not criminally prohibit military recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups. Jamaica also does not meet the international standard for free public education as free education is only guaranteed for Jamaican citizens, leaving those without citizenship vulnerable to child labor. (23) Moreover, as the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (13)

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 & Activities
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS)	Enforces and administers child labor laws through the labor inspectorate, in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. (25) Responsible for policy development as well as the management of government agencies involved in child labor enforcement. (4,9) In 2022, its Child Labor Unit trained approximately 85 inspectors and social workers on MLSS's Standard Operating Procedures, which outline how to identify, report, refer, and treat suspected cases of child trafficking and child labor. (8) MLSS also organized outreach sessions on child labor and labor trafficking through workshops with key populations and vulnerable groups. (8)
Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF)	Investigates, through the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Vice Squad (A-TIP Vice Squad), cases of child trafficking including forced child labor, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities in which human trafficking is involved. (8,25) The A-TIP Vice Squad has over 250 officers and leads operations and case management activities for human trafficking cases. In 2022, the A-TIP Vice Squad conducted operations in areas at high risk for commercial sex. (8) Through the Center for the Investigation of Sexual Offenses and Child Abuse, investigates sex crimes against children and educates the public about these crimes. (25) Authorized to assess penalties when child labor violations are found. (4) Receives referrals of suspected child labor law violations and other abuses for criminal enforcement from the Ministry of Education and Youth, Child Protective and Family Services, and the MLSS. The Ministry of National Security, through the JCF, is the only government body with the power to conduct arrests. (4)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions	Prosecutes cases involving the worst forms of child labor. (26) Receives referrals of suspected child labor law violations for possible prosecution from the Ministry of Education and Youth, Child Protective and Family Services, and the MLSS. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Jamaica took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MLSS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$3,200,000 (5)	\$3,500,000 (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	39 (27)	41 (4)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (13,28)	Yes (13,28)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	N/A (5)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	1,679 (5)	2,319 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (5)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (5)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (5)	0 (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (5)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (28)	Yes (28)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (5)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (4)

Research indicates that Jamaica does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (29,30) Inspectors are not allowed to enter and inspect private residences; however, labor inspectors may coordinate visits with social workers who are allowed to enter private residences and are trained to watch for indicators of child labor. (5) Inspectors do not have authority to assess penalties, but if a labor inspector observes a suspected child labor violation during an inspection, the case is referred to the MLSS Child Labor Unit for investigation and possible referral for legal action through the courts. Fines and penalties can be levied or collected upon summary conviction in court. (4) NGO leaders point to a lack of new initiatives and programming, staffing issues, and budgetary shortfalls within relevant government institutions as negatively impacting efforts toward the elimination of child labor. (4)

In 2022, the labor inspectorate employed 41 inspectors and an additional 111 social workers. The MLSS reported that 85 members of its staff, including some labor inspectors, received refresher training on child labor and human trafficking, with the primary goal of the training being identification of child labor violations. (4) Labor inspections were conducted at formal and informal worksites including shops, factories, port facilities, and construction sites. During the reporting period, child labor investigations primarily focused on drinking establishments where teenage girls are known to work exceptionally long hours and be denied their pay; however, the government identified no child labor violations. (4) In 2022, the MLSS implemented a new General Compliance Inspection Form to enable greater volume and standardization in inspections. (4)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Jamaica took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of 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	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	28 (5)	60 (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	3 (5)	7 (4)
Number of Convictions	2 (5)	1 (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (5)	No (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (4)

The Government of Jamaica made progress in prosecuting human trafficking cases, as the criminal justice sector increased investigations across the island and nearly doubled its prosecutions from the previous year. Key ministries, departments, and agencies developed and implemented counter-trafficking procedures to improve victim identification and referral services. (8) In 2022, the government reported that 202 police officers and 95 other enforcement officials received trafficking in persons training, including training on child labor violations. (4) Various government agencies, often in partnerships with NGOs, offered training on identifying human trafficking victims and on the National Referral Mechanism for child trafficking. (8)

Based on referrals from the National Children's Registry, the government conducted 36 investigations into potential child trafficking cases during the reporting period. In March 2022, authorities arrested a suspected trafficker and four alleged clients in a case involving a child under age 16 working in a bar who was exploited in sex trafficking; the pimp was prosecuted and convicted and was awaiting sentencing at the close of the reporting period. (4,9) The clients were also prosecuted. In 2022, the government opened three new Child-Friendly Spaces for interviewing and assisting suspected victims and participated in trainings for criminal justice professionals and social services providers who may come into contact with child trafficking victims. (9) The government also identified six additional victims of child labor crimes, including commercial sexual exploitation, and placed them in state care where they received counseling, mental health screening, and educational support. In contrast, law enforcement authorities detained and imprisoned children for alleged participation in illegal activities, including violent crimes and involvement with gang activities; it did not screen all of those children for trafficking victimization. (4) In addition, an NGO reported that not all cases of child abuse were routinely screened for signs of human trafficking. (8)

Jamaica's Office of the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons (ONRTIP) reported several law enforcement challenges, including the use of evolving social media tactics by perpetrators, difficulties in getting survivors to self-report, child victims who become adults and no longer want to pursue cases in court, the lengthy judicial process, attrition rates of investigators and prosecutors, and financial and human resource constraints. (4,8) During the reporting period, ONRTIP developed a TIP Data Capacity Assessment of Ministries,

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Departments, and Agencies to create a more objective reporting system on human trafficking in Jamaica. It also signed a Cooperative Agreement with government departments and NGOs that allows ONRTIP to routinely collect, analyze, and report high-quality data on human trafficking. (8)

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).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Steering Committee on the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor	Provides leadership and guidance on policies and programs aimed at reducing and eliminating child labor. Partners with the MLSS Child Labor Unit and National Task Force Against Trafficking in Persons (NATFATIP), a multi-agency body comprising various ministries, departments, agencies of government, and representatives of three NGOs. (4,8) Conducted interventions and engagement sessions geared toward children living in high-risk communities, virtual sensitization sessions for government workers and municipal children's clubs, and outreach to teenagers at a symposium for those considering the transition from school to work. (4)

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 adequately address child labor, including a lack of implementation of a new national child labor plan.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Plan of Action for Combating Trafficking in Persons	Identifies objectives, actions, and responsible agencies to prevent and eliminate human trafficking, including commercial sexual exploitation of children and forced child labor, through prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships. (12,31) Guides the activities of NATFATIP. (8) Though the plan expired at the end of 2021, the government reported it continued to guide NATFATIP's activities. (9)
National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV)	Provides a coordinated and structured approach to addressing the key issues and challenges pertaining to child violence and abuse. (32) Outlines a range of strategies and programs that will be implemented over 5 years across multiple stages in a child's life. The NPACV is implemented, monitored, and evaluated by an Inter-Sectoral Committee on Children and Violence. (6) The government continued to support and implement this policy during the reporting period, including the launch of Project Birthright, an initiative to provide free birth certificates to undocumented Jamaicans, especially vulnerable children. (4,9,33)

During the reporting period, the MLSS drafted a new 2022–2027 roadmap, the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor in Jamaica, to reduce child labor. However, this roadmap has not yet been implemented, as it is awaiting full approval by the Cabinet. (4)

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 the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Program for Advancement through Health and Education† (PATH)	Government of Jamaica and World Bank-funded conditional cash transfer program launched in 2002 that helps reduce child labor by requiring participants to attend school at least 85 percent of the academic days in a month. (5,25,34,35) The MLSS expanded PATH payments to more than 150,000 students and payments in 2022 totaled approximately \$38.3 million. The government provided additional benefits in the form of nutritional assistance and funding for school supplies totaling more than \$13.3 million. (4)
Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor (2022–2025)	An intergovernmental cooperation platform made up of 30 countries, with active participation of employers' and workers' organizations. (36) Seeks to declare Latin America and the Caribbean as the first developing region free of child labor by 2025. Drawing on the knowledge, experience, and accumulated capacity of key public and private actors, aims to address the persistence of child work. (37) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the program during the reporting period.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)

Program	Description & Activities
U.S.-Jamaica Child Protection Compact Partnership (CPC Partnership) (2018–2022)	A 4-year plan partially funded by the U.S. Government that enhanced the efforts of the Government of Jamaica to address child trafficking. (10) In 2022, opened three new Child-Friendly Spaces to support survivors and participated in trainings for criminal justice professionals and social services providers who may come into contact with child trafficking victims. (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 Jamaica.

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

The government conducted 14 awareness-raising sessions and 5 outreach workshops on child labor and human trafficking, mostly in the high-risk communities of Kingston and Montego Bay, that reached an estimated 1,200 community members. (4) In addition, the MLSS Child Labor Unit launched a video competition for students to produce short video monologues discussing their feelings about child labor in Jamaica. Child Labor Unit personnel also conducted workshops for students and teachers in Portland and Trelawny, parishes identified by the Child Labor Risk Identification model as being at particular risk for increases in child labor, that facilitated discussions on strategies to combat child labor. (4) Furthermore, the government participated in the Angel Watch program that facilitates information sharing on individuals attempting to enter the country who have been charged with sexual offenses. (8) Although Jamaica funds education-related social programs, current resources are insufficient, and social programs do not fully address the scope and magnitude of the problem. (11) Research found no evidence of programs designed for children working in agriculture or street work, or for those subjected to commercial sexual exploitation.

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 Jamaica (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that laws include higher penalties for the use of children in the production and distribution of drugs.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that legislation criminally prohibits the use of a child for prostitution.	2021 – 2022
	Raise the minimum age for work from 15 to 16 to align with the compulsory education age.	2021 – 2022
	Establish by law that free basic public education is available to all children, regardless of citizenship.	2021 – 2022
	Pass legislation that will determine the specific light work activities and hours permissible for children ages 13 and 14 to facilitate enforcement.	2014 – 2022
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 41 to 88 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 1.3 million people.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that initiatives and programming, staffing levels, and the budget for agencies, including the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, are sufficient to identify child labor violations and fulfill their mandates.	2022
	Ensure that children, including those participating in illicit activities and victims of child abuse, are adequately screened for indicators of human trafficking, including forced labor.	2022
Government Policies	Increase the integration of child labor elimination and prevention strategies into existing and future policies.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the roadmap developed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security aimed at reducing child labor is implemented.	2022
Social Programs	Ensure that social programs adequately address child labor, including in street work, commercial sexual exploitation, agricultural work, and other worst forms of child labor, particularly in rural areas.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that school costs, such as uniforms, books, food, and transportation, do not diminish access to free public education, including for students at traditional and non-traditional schools.	2017 – 2022
	Implement a program to report, identify, and find missing children who may have been forced into child labor.	2020 – 2022
	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children working in farming and fishing to inform policies and programs.	2021 – 2022

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Ensure that children with disabilities, particularly in rural areas, have access to an education, and resume visits by officers to ensure attendance.	2022
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labor and make information about such measures publicly available.	2022

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