

In 2022, Kiribati made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In 2022, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs launched a child protection case management and referral system called SafeNet, which allows personnel from the government, churches, and NGOs to share information and assist child victims, including those found in exploitive situations. Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Kiribati are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. Existing laws do not identify hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children. The law also does not specify the conditions under which light work can be undertaken. In addition, the government has not adopted a national policy to address 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 Kiribati. 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	14.6 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.8
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	29.7
Primary Completion Rate (%)		93.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018–2019. (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
Industry	Construction and cargo loading (3)
Services	Street work, including vending and working in <i>kava</i> bars (4,5)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, including on foreign fishing vessels (3,6,7)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)-(c) of ILO C. 182.

In 2022, children were found street vending, selling food at night, and working in *kava* bars. They worked late hours and were exposed to extreme weather and other physical safety hazards. (5) A survey conducted in 2018 and 2019 found that 7 percent of children (approximately 357 individuals) worked in economic activities for more than the legally permitted number of hours. Moreover, 9 percent of children (approximately 463 individuals) were similarly involved in household chores at or above the age-specific thresholds, and 15 percent of children (approximately 750 individuals) were engaged in hazardous activities. (8)

Underage girls have been subjected to commercial sexual exploitation by crew members from foreign vessels. (3,6) However, there have been no reports of this occurring in the last 2 years as COVID-19 pandemic-related regulations have restricted entry of vessels into Kiribati. (4,5)




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### II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Kiribati 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 Kiribati's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the identification of hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Section 115 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 117 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 244 and 249 of the Penal Code; Sections 118(1)(a, c, d) and 122 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,10)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 2, 43, and 44 of the Measures to Combat Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime Act; Section 118(1)(b) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,11)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 136, 141, and 142 of the Penal Code; Sections 118(1)(f), 118(1)(g), and 118(2) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,10)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 142 of the Penal Code; Sections 118(1)(h) and 118(1)(i) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9,10)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A†		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Sections 118(1)(e) of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code (9)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15	Section 7 of the Education Act (12)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 11 of the Education Act (12)

† Country has no standing military (13)

The government has not identified by national law or regulations the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. Also, under Article 116 of the Employment and Industrial Relations Code, the laws do not specify the activities and hours of work per week that are acceptable for children engaged in light work, or the conditions under which light work can be undertaken. (9) In addition, as the minimum age for work of 14 is lower than the compulsory education age of 15, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (9,12)

### 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).

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

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Employment and Human Resources	Enforces labor laws, including those related to child labor. (4)
Kiribati Police Services	Enforce criminal laws related to forced child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. (5) Investigate cases of human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children through a special Domestic Violence and Sexual Offenses Unit. (14)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Kiribati took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of training for labor inspectors.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$17,300 (4)	Unknown (5)
Number of Labor Inspectors	5 (4)	5 (5)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (9)	Yes (5)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	No (4)	No (5)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksites	81 (4)	Unknown (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (4)	0 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (4)	0 (5)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (4)	0 (5)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (4)	Yes (5)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (4)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (9)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (4)	Yes (5)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (4)	Yes (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (5)

During the reporting period, virtual trainings for labor inspectors were conducted with the ILO, although trainings were not focused on child labor issues. (5) Although the number of labor inspectors meets the ILO's technical advice, the government's ability to inspect and report on child labor issues was affected by geographical distances, isolation, sparse population, and Internet connectivity challenges. (3) In addition, research indicates that labor inspections have not been extended to informal and high-risk sectors with evidence of child labor, including its worst forms, such as fishing vessels, kava bars, domestic work, and nightclubs. (15) Resource and capacity constraints restrict the government's services and activities related to labor law enforcement, including training for labor inspectors. (4)

#### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Kiribati took actions to address child labor (Table 7).

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (4)	No (5)
Number of Investigations	0 (4)	0 (5)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (4)	0 (5)
Number of Convictions	0 (4)	0 (5)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	0 (4)	0 (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (4)	Yes (5)

Financial resource constraints hampered the government's ability to provide trainings for criminal investigators. (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).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Child Protection Working Group	A government interagency group coordinated by the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs. (5) Oversees the implementation of the Child, Young People and Family Welfare Act. (3) The Child Protection Working Group remained active during the reporting period. (16)

In November 2022, the government launched the Child Protection Referral Pathway. (16-18) In December, the Ministry of Women, Youth, Sport, and Social Affairs held a week-long training on child protection for social welfare officers and counselors. The new Child Protection Referral Pathway was a main topic of this training. (19) In addition, the government continued to use and strengthen SafeNet, a child protection case management and referral system. (5, 16, 20)

## 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 coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description & Activities
Children, Young People, and Families Welfare System Policy	Focuses on strengthening the welfare system, in part by implementing services to prevent the abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation of children and young people, including in hazardous labor. (21) During the reporting period, the government remained active in strengthening child protection activities and continued implementing this policy. (5)
United Nations Pacific Strategy (2018–2022)	Addressed, developed, and implemented strategic economic development priorities in the South Pacific, including eliminating child labor and the worst forms of child labor. This multi-national strategic framework program covered 14 South Pacific nations. (22,23) Activities were conducted under the UNICEF Pacific Multi-Country Child Protection Program (2018–2022). (22,23) Research was unable to determine whether activities took place in Kiribati in 2022.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (3, 6, 15)

Research found no evidence of a policy that focuses specifically on addressing the worst forms of child labor. (6)

## 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 to address child labor in all sectors.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description & Activities
UNICEF Pacific Multi-Country Child Protection Program (2018–2022)	Prioritized children's rights including the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. This was a multi-country program in 14 Pacific Island countries aligned with the UN Pacific Strategy (2018–2022). (23,24) Research was unable to determine whether activities took place in Kiribati in 2022.
Hotlines†	Child Protection Officer-, Ministry of Women, Youth, Sports, and Social Affairs- and police-supported 24-hour hotlines for children to report violations, request information, or obtain access to services. Hotlines remained active in 2022. (5,16)

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 Kiribati.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (4,25)

Foreign development partners supported funding for counseling and shelter services for vulnerable women and children experiencing domestic violence and exploitation. The geographical distance, isolation, and sparsely populated nature of Kiribati's islands challenges the government's ability to provide public services. (5) Although the government has implemented programs to assist children in exploitative and abusive situations, research found no evidence that the government has carried out programs specifically designed to assist children who are engaged in construction and street vending work, or young girls subjected to commercial sexual exploitation with crew members from foreign fishing vessels. (5)

## 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 Kiribati (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work from 14 to 15 to align with the compulsory education age.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that the law specifies the activities and number of hours of work per week that are acceptable for children engaged in light work, and the conditions under which children can engage in light work.	2015 – 2022
	Determine by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, after consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2011 – 2022
Enforcement	Institutionalize training on child labor laws for labor inspectors and criminal investigators and allocate funding for this training.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors are inspecting informal and high-risk sectors where there is evidence of child labor violations, including its worst forms.	2021 – 2022
	Publish labor law enforcement information, including labor inspectorate funding and the number of labor inspections conducted at the worksite.	2022
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses the worst forms of child labor.	2014 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor in all sectors to inform policies and programs.	2017 – 2022
	Implement social programs to address all relevant forms of child labor, including in construction and street vending.	2017 – 2022

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