

In 2022, Maldives made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government significantly increased the number of labor inspections from 124 inspections in 2021 to 656 in 2022. It also increased the budget for labor inspections and the number of labor inspectors from 23 to 32. Moreover, the government began conducting a baseline study on trafficking in persons throughout the country's atolls. However, children in Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work, illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work. Information on children's work is limited because a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. Laws in Maldives also do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited.



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

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

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

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	3.9 (2,364)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	79.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		91.7

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 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2009. (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
Services	Domestic work (3)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3-8)
	Forced labor in domestic work (9)
	Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs (3,4,6,10)

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

Information on children's work is limited because a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. (11) Moreover, the prevalence of child labor may be higher due to the number of undocumented migrant children from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries in Maldives. Some undocumented migrant girls are reported to be targeted for commercial sexual exploitation by traffickers. (3,11,12) Maldivian children from the outer islands are brought to the capital, Malé, for domestic work. Once there, some of these children, including some from impoverished families, may be more vulnerable to sex or labor trafficking. (3,8,12) There are also reports of foreign tourists engaging in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (7,13) Maldivian children, especially boys, are also forced by traffickers to engage in the transportation of drugs for criminal gangs. (3,8,14)

The right to free primary and secondary education is provided to all children, but there is a shortage of trained teachers, classrooms, as well as teachers and resources for students with disabilities, in Maldives. (11,14-17) Girls are less likely to be enrolled in lower secondary education than boys, increasing their risk to child labor. (8,14,18)

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In addition, while there are primary schools on all islands, some students must travel to other islands to attend secondary school. In these instances, some children participate in domestic work in exchange for room and board; however, this practice has decreased in recent years. (6,14)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Maldives 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 Maldives' legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a failure to prohibit the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Sections 6 and 12 of the Employment Act; Article 26 of the Child Rights Protection Act; Section 8 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection (10,15,19,20)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 7 and 12 of the Employment Act (19)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 10 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection (10,20,21)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Section 3 of the Employment Act; Sections 10–14, 16–18, 21, and 25 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 3–8 and 11 of the 2nd Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Article 25 of the Constitution; Sections 26 and 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act (15,16,19,22,23)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Sections 10–14, 17–18, and 21 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 3–8 and 11 of the 2nd Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (22,23)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 17–19 of the Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders; Sections 11 and 123 of the Child Rights Protection Act; Sections 13, 14, 17, 18, and 21 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 4–8 and 11 of the 2nd Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (15,22–24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 133(c)(1) of the Drugs Act; Article 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act (10,15,25)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Legislation title unknown
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 14 of the Education Act; Section 21 of the Child Rights Protection Act (15,16,26)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children; Articles 17–20 of the Education Act (16,26,27)

\* Country has no conscription (28)

The Second Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act expressly criminalizes the trafficking of children across borders and internally for purposes of exploitation. (23) The definition of exploitation in the Act includes forced labor, forced marriages, and forced engagement in sexual activities or prostitution. (10,13,23,29) However, the laws prohibiting forced labor in Maldives are not sufficient overall as they do not criminalize slavery. Laws prohibiting child trafficking are also insufficient because they require the use of force, fraud or coercion for the crime of child trafficking. (22,23) Moreover, laws in Maldives do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited. (15,23,24)

### 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
Labor Relations Authority, Ministry of Economic Development	Conducts labor inspections and issues fines for violations in accordance with the Employment Act. (10,19) All labor inspections look for child labor violations related to minimum age requirements as well as forced labor and hazardous work, but there are no officers dedicated to child labor issues. (10) Penalties can be assessed during or after inspections, but are not enforced during initial inspections. (11) If violations are identified, a timeline is given to rectify violations. Follow-up inspections are then conducted to check compliance with the recommendations of the Labor Relations Authority. (11) Penalties are imposed in the event of noncompliance. If the Labor Relations Authority identifies a child employed in violation of child labor laws during inspections, a referral letter is sent via government intranet to the Child and Family Protection Service, who then takes over the case. (11) Inspections are carried out based on a schedule published at the beginning of every year, with a focus on sectors and establishments that employ large numbers of employees and on establishments that have a history of cases filed with the Labor Relations Authority. During 2022, inspections were carried out in Greater Malé Area and in every atoll of the Maldives, including in tourist resorts and islands with larger populations. (11) Received nine recommendations from the Children's Ombudsperson on implementing monitoring mechanisms, formulating a standard operating procedure, and maintaining statistics. (30) Moreover, a 2-day training on human trafficking, human smuggling, and survivor assistance, including for child survivors of such cases, was conducted for 38 labor inspectors, including officers from the awareness unit. (11)
Maldives Police Service	The Family and Child Protection Department investigates complaints of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Refers cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for prosecution and to the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services to provide survivor services. (11) The Anti-Human Trafficking Department investigates human trafficking-related offenses and enforces laws prohibiting trafficking in persons, including cases of child trafficking. (6,13)
Prosecutor General's Office	Raises charges and oversees the conduct of criminal matters on behalf of the state, including for cases of child exploitation referred by the Maldives Police Service. (4,10) In cases regarding child exploitation and trafficking, a victim support officer from the Prosecutor General Office's Witness and Victims Support Service Unit and a prosecutor will join the case to identify imminent threats or probable risks and ensure the safety of the child survivor. (3,4)

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### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Labor Relations Authority that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial and human resource allocations.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$44,419 (31)	\$116,731 (11)
Number of Labor Inspectors	23 (10)	32 (11,30)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (19)	Yes (19)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (10)	Yes (11)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	124 (10)	656 (11,30)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	14 (10)	24 (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (10)	0 (31)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (10)	0 (31)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (10)	Yes (11)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (10)	Yes (11)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (19)	Yes (11)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (10)	Yes (11)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (10)	Yes (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (10,32,33)	Yes (10,11,32,33)

During the reporting period, all cases of child labor that were identified occurred within the tourism industry. The Labor Relations Authority faced challenges in enforcement due to the insufficient number of labor inspectors and travel budget to regularly inspect the country's many islands, including outlying atolls, despite increased budget in 2022. (11,31) Moreover, inspectors used their own personal vehicles for transportation for inspections that occurred within the Greater Malé Area, as the budget did not cover vehicle acquisition cost. There were reports that Labor Relations Authority inspectors accepted bribes and that the Labor Relations Authority lacked the institutional independence from the Ministry of Economic Development to fulfill its mandate and was subject to influence by politicians. (3,11)

### Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Family and Child Protection Department of the Maldives Police Service that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including a lack of resources for investigators.

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (10)	Yes (11)
Number of Investigations	0 (33)	66 (31)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (10)	3 (31)
Number of Convictions	0 (10)	0 (31)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (10)	N/A (31)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (10)	Yes (11)

In 2022, the Maldives Police Service did not report any investigations of commercial sexual exploitation of children, compared to investigating 291 incidents in the previous reporting period, including referring 115 cases for prosecution; the status of these 115 cases and whether the government initiated any prosecutions or achieved any convictions is unknown. (3) Sri Lankan police arrested a former senior Maldivian government official in July 2021 for alleged involvement in a child sex trafficking ring in Sri Lanka; however, the Maldivian government did not report an investigation of the case in 2022. Law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges' lack

of awareness, sensitization, and training on the differences between child labor cases and other labor-related cases, distinguishing between sex trafficking and sexual abuse of children, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act may have contributed to a lack of successful prosecutions. (3,11,29) Though some trainings covered aspects of child labor, prosecutors did not participate directly in trainings that specifically focused on child labor. (11) There were also concerns that traffickers could use resorts and guesthouses to facilitate commercial sexual exploitation of children during travel because no government agency has the authority or resources to monitor these establishments for such crimes. (3)

#### 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 a coordination body to address all forms of child labor.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office	Established at the Ministry of Defense to implement the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan and undertake prevention efforts. (32) In 2022, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office received a budget of \$64,850, implemented the 2021–2022 National Action Plan, and drafted the 2023–2024 National Action Plan. Moreover, the Office participated in several workshops and webinars on labor migration and human trafficking in the Maldives. (3,35)

Although Maldives has the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office to coordinate efforts to address the trafficking of children, it does not have coordinating mechanisms to address other forms of child labor.

#### 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 a lack of coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

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

Policy	Description & Activities
Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan (2020–2022)	Established the government’s goals to address human trafficking, including of children, by creating institutions, coordinating activities, raising awareness, and building capacity. (36) During the reporting period, began conducting a baseline study on human trafficking throughout the country’s atolls, reviewed draft Victim Assistance and Shelter Service regulations, and held workshops for law enforcement officials. (11,35)

NGOs have stated that the lack of cohesive standard operating procedures delineating specific roles for all agencies, as well as procedures referring survivors to care and support services, may have resulted in a lack of referrals and the possibility that survivors were not identified, given the large number of migrant workers present in the country and the small number of survivors identified. (3,29) Research found no evidence of a policy designed to address other relevant forms of child labor, such as forced labor in domestic work or drug trafficking.

#### 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 child labor in all sectors.

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

Program	Description & Activities
Family and Children's Service Centers†	Nineteen Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services-operated centers that provide psychosocial support for child survivors of abuse and exploitation, four of which provide temporary shelter for survivors. (4,37) However, Family and Children's Service Centers and shelters lack adequate financial and human resources, and staff are inadequately trained to deal with cases involving abused and exploited children. (37) While reported to be active during the reporting period, research was unable to determine which activities were undertaken. (11,38)
National Victim Support Hotline (Number 1696)†	A 24-hour hotline dedicated to receiving reports of human trafficking and child labor. Formerly operated by the Maldives Police Service, but is in the process of being relocated to the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office. (33) During the reporting period, the hotline was suspended due to lack of staff, resulting in the Maldives Police Service's Anti-Trafficking Department operating a temporary hotline to address this need. (3,35)

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 Maldives.

A temporary shelter for human trafficking survivors was closed, but two survivors in need of services were provided temporary shelter in guesthouses. (35) Existing social programs do not specifically address commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, or forced labor in domestic work. Furthermore, no actions were taken to reduce demand for commercial sex or commercial sexual exploitation of children during travel during the reporting period. (11,29)

## 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 Maldives (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that laws prohibiting forced labor criminalize slavery.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that laws prohibiting child trafficking do not require the use of force, fraud and coercion.	2021 – 2022
	Criminally prohibit all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including procuring, offering, and using children for pornographic performances.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
Enforcement	Ensure that the Labor Relations Authority has institutional independence from the Ministry of Economic Development to fulfill its mandate and is not subject to influence from politicians.	2022
	Ensure that investigators have the resources necessary, including transportation and adequate number of staff, to enforce laws on the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges receive training on the appropriate handling of child labor, sex trafficking, and sexual abuse cases, as well as the proper application of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act to cases.	2020 – 2022
	Ensure that government officials are investigated and, where appropriate, prosecuted for involvement in the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2022
Coordination	Establish coordinating mechanisms to prevent and eliminate all worst forms of child labor.	2022
Government Policies	Adopt a policy to address all relevant forms of child labor and forced child labor, including domestic work and drug trafficking.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that adequate standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral, as well as the provision of needed victim services, are developed and effectively implemented.	2021 – 2022
Social Programs	Conduct and publish a national child labor survey that includes both Maldivian and migrant children.	2009 – 2022
	Improve access to secondary education, particularly for girls, by ensuring adequate resources, secondary schools, and number of teachers, including for students with disabilities.	2021 – 2022
	Publish information about activities undertaken to implement social programs, including the Child Helpline and Family and Children's Service Centers.	2017 – 2022



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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Provide sufficient funding, human resources, and staff training for Family and Children's Service Centers and shelters that serve abused and exploited children.	2018 – 2022
	Implement and provide sufficient resources for programs that address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, and forced labor in domestic work.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that adequate victim referral mechanisms, including the National Victim Support Hotline, are established, operational, and sufficiently staffed.	2021 – 2022

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