

In 2022, Nicaragua made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government established the new National Strategic Plan for the Prevention, Care, Investigation, Persecution, and Sanction of Human Trafficking. However, children in Nicaragua are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Laws do not establish a clear compulsory education age, and the government lacks adequate services for human trafficking survivors, such as shelters. In addition, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies lack the financial and human resources necessary to fulfill their mandates. Furthermore, the government lacks a specific and consistent mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Nicaragua. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

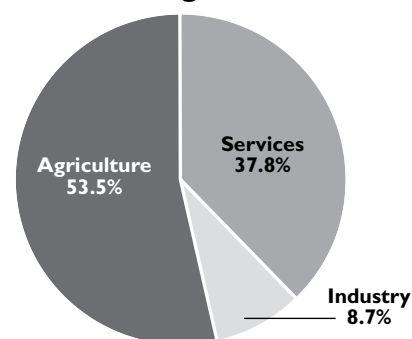
Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	10 to 14	47.7 (342,076)
Attending School (%)	10 to 14	88.3
Combining Work and School (%)	10 to 14	40.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Encuesta Continua de Hogares (ECH), 2012. (2)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 10-14



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	Harvesting coffee, bananas, and tobacco† (3-6)
	Raising livestock† (7,8)
	Fishing,† including collecting shellfish† (8-11)
Industry	Construction† (7,8,11,12)
	Quarrying† of pumice and limestone, and mining† of gold (3,8-14)
	Production of gravel (crushed stones)† (15)
Services	Domestic work (7-11)
	Work in transportation† (7,8)
	Work in tourism and the hotel industry (7,9)
	Work in restaurants (9)
	Street work (7-10)

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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‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and use in the production of pornography (9,12,16-18)
	Forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, construction, and mining (12,18)
	Forced begging (12,13,19)
	Use in illicit activities, including in drug production and drug trafficking, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (7,11,12)

† 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.

Information about the prevalence of child labor in Nicaragua is limited because the last known national survey on child labor was published in 2012. (7,20,21) Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a stalled economy, many Nicaraguans established informal family businesses, which are more likely to use child labor. (9) Reports also indicate that as a direct result of the pandemic, child labor increased in Nicaragua, with a visible increase of children working at traffic lights. Children in Nicaragua are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, particularly in Granada, Managua, the Caribbean Autonomous Regions, and San Juan del Sur. (13,22,23) Children from poor rural areas, those in the Caribbean Autonomous Regions, and migrants from the Northern Triangle countries are particularly vulnerable. (13,24) Children who lack identification documents, sometimes due to a lack of birth registration, may not have access to social services and are at an increased risk of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. (25)




Research indicates that the government continues to impede the work of civil society organizations by threatening them with fines or closure if deemed in opposition to the government. (9) Over 3,300 national and international civil society organizations have been closed by the government since 2018, with approximately 3,100 of these closures happening in 2022 alone. (11,26-34) Among the organizations affected by the closures, there are many that provided social services to prevent child labor and aid to child labor survivors, as well as other services to children survivors of violence. In particular, NGOs associated with the Nicaraguan Coordinating Federation of NGOs that Work on Children and Adolescent Issues (CODENI) have been threatened by the regime and risk closure themselves. (11,27,30-33) As a result, numerous civil society organizations were forced to close or suspend their activities in the country in 2022, which may increase the vulnerability of children to exploitation. (11,34)

Education is free and compulsory in Nicaragua; however, the costs associated with school supplies and transportation make it difficult for some children, particularly those from poor backgrounds and rural areas, to attend school. (7,16) Another barrier facing children from rural areas is long distances and a lack of secure transportation. (9,11) There are also reports of poor preschool education, particularly among disadvantaged rural households, insufficient learning materials, as well as a lack of quality and limited school infrastructure. Only 50 percent of schools in the country provide basic drinking water. (35,36) School infrastructures are also very susceptible to damage or destruction during natural disasters. Children from indigenous groups and African descent face significant discrimination in accessing education. (35)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Nicaragua 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 Nicaragua's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of a compulsory education age that equals the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Articles 130 and 131 of the Labor Code; Articles 2 and 73 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 84 of the Constitution (37-40)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 130, 133, and 135 of the Labor Code; Article 1 of Ministerial Agreement No. JCHG-08-06-10; Articles 2 and 74 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (37-39,41)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 1 and 6 of Ministerial Agreement No. JCHG-08-06-10; Articles 133 and 135 of the Labor Code (37,41)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 40 of the Constitution; Articles 5, 6, and 61 of the Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 16, 182, 182 <i>bis</i> , and 315 of the Penal Code (40,42,43)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Part III and Articles 3, 6, and 61 of the Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 16, 182, and 182 <i>bis</i> of the Penal Code; Article 40 of the Constitution (40,42,43)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 6 and 61 of the Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 175, 176, 178–180, 182, and 182 <i>bis</i> of the Penal Code; Articles 5 and 26 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (39,42,43)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 6 and 61 of the Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 182, 182 <i>bis</i> , 349, 351, 352, 359, and 362 of the Penal Code (42,43)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Annex I of the Code on the Organization, Jurisdiction, and Social Welfare of the Military (44)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 509 of the Penal Code; Article 79 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 95 of the Constitution (39,40,42)
Compulsory Education Age	No	12‡	Article 121 of the Constitution; Articles 19 and 23 of the Education Law; Article 43 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (39,40,45)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 121 of the Constitution; Articles 8, 19, and 23 of the Education Law; Article 43 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (39,40,45)

* Country has no conscription (40)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (39,40,45)

Nicaraguan law is not clear regarding the age up to which education is compulsory. Article 121 of the Constitution states that primary school education is compulsory; however, it does not specify an age. (40) Under

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Articles 19 and 23 of the Education Law, education is compulsory only through the sixth grade, which it specifies is up to age 12 and the end of primary school. The Education Law defines secondary education as between the ages of 12 and 17. (45) Meanwhile, Article 43 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code states that both primary and secondary school education are compulsory. (39) If the compulsory education age is 12, children ages 12 to 14 may be vulnerable to child labor and its worst forms because they are not permitted to work but are also not required to be in school. However, if the compulsory education age is 17, the lower minimum age for work may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (39,40,45)

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 (MITRAB)	Enforces labor laws and sets child labor policy priorities. Conducts labor inspections through its General Labor Inspectorate and conducts child labor inspections through its Child Labor Inspections Unit. (9,18) Conducts training on child labor issues and inspections. Maintains a mailbox in each of Nicaragua's 17 departments to receive complaints of child labor violations. (9,18)
Nicaraguan National Police	Address cases of child labor and human trafficking through the Police Intelligence Unit, which detects crimes, and the Special Crimes Unit, which investigates crimes. Maintains a hotline for reporting violations of children's rights. (9,18)
Prosecutor's Office	Prosecutes cases of child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities. Contains 2 national-level and 35 department-level prosecutors who prosecute these and other crimes. (9,18)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Nicaragua took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor (MITRAB) 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	\$1,310,000 (9)	\$1,295,677 (11)
Number of Labor Inspectors	97 (9)	Unknown (11)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (37)	Yes (37)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (46)	Unknown (11)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (9)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	3 (46)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (9)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (9)	Unknown (11)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Unknown (11)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (9)	Unknown (11)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (47)	Yes (47)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Unknown (11)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (9)	Yes (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (11)

Reports indicate that funding levels for the labor inspectorate are insufficient to address the scope of the child labor problem in the country. (11) The government has indicated that approximately 42 percent of MITRAB's overall budget goes to labor inspections. (9,46) Nicaragua has a large informal and rural workforce, and the Labor Inspectorate is unable to adequately cover the country's vulnerabilities to, and the magnitude of, labor violations. Moreover, most labor inspections are focused on the formal sector, which represents only an estimated 15

percent of the economy, instead of in the informal sector, which is where most child labor occurs. (8,11,16) Research also indicates that Nicaragua does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (48-51)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Nicaragua 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 deficient structures for investigation and prosecution of the worst forms of child labor.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (9)	Unknown (11)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (48)	Unknown (11)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (48)	Unknown (11)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (48)	Unknown (11)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (48)	Unknown (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (11)

As the government does not provide access to judicial proceedings, independent observers are unable to verify arrests, detentions, and convictions of individuals. (51) Research indicates that criminal law enforcement agencies lack effective investigation, prosecution, and prevention efforts. (52) In addition, government efforts related to the worst forms of child labor do not adequately address the scope of the problem, as there are very few, if any, human trafficking investigations, including in cases related to child exploitation, that lead to prosecutions, with very few victims being identified by the state. (52,53) Although the Ministry of the Family, Adolescence, and Childhood (MIFAN) also maintains a guide for assisting child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, the government has no formal procedures for the identification of human trafficking victims among high-risk populations, including children who are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, particularly in rural areas and the Caribbean Coast. (34,53) While there is a reciprocal referral mechanism between criminal authorities and social services in the country, there is no information as to the extent it is used or the effectiveness of the mechanism. (9)

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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Social Welfare System (SNBS)	Coordinates efforts on child labor and ensures that government institutions protect the rights of children and provide social services to them as part of their mandate to assist the Nicaraguan population. Comprises various government ministries, including MITRAB; the Ministry of the Family, Adolescence, and Childhood (MIFAN); the Ministry of Education (MINED); the Ministry of Health (MINSAL); and the Ministry of Governance. (9) SNBS does not have a specific and consistent coordinating mechanism due to limited coordination among constituent ministries and a lack of financial resources dedicated to addressing child labor. (15) Research was unable to determine whether the SNBS Coordinating Body carried out activities to address child labor during the reporting period.

Reports indicate that the National Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons (NCATIP) continues to not engage with local civil society, despite being required to do so by law. Local civil society organizations were also unable to corroborate increased NCATIP activity in the local working groups, and in general, the government did not coordinate with or fund NGOs. (9,11,13,16,17,22,24,53,54) A significant number of NGOs that provided services

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for survivors of human trafficking have been stripped of their legal status and had their property seized by the government. (34) Some civil organizations have reported a continued dismantling of once-active NCATIP regional committees and state that NCATIP has had no measurable impact since its creation. (24,51) NCATIP has still not announced or appointed a person to the position of Executive Secretariat, which is mandated by the Law Against Trafficking in Persons. (9,16)

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
Good Government Plan	Sets development goals for government ministries, including MITRAB, MINED, and MINSa. Prioritizes human trafficking investigations; aims to protect children from commercial sexual exploitation; and commits to training teachers by creating 1,000 primary school teaching positions and increasing access to education, including for indigenous and Afro-descendant children. (55) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken during the reporting period to implement the Good Government Plan.
National Strategic Plan for the Prevention, Care, Investigation, Persecution, and Sanction of Human Trafficking (2023–2027) †	Launched in March 2022. Seeks to implement actions to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and sanction human trafficking, as well as to provide assistance and protection to survivors in a comprehensive manner. (56) As part of these efforts it will carry out awareness raising, trainings, and capacity-building activities. It will also seek to generate and improve coordination mechanisms between agencies to efficiently respond to complaints. (56)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

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 insufficient scope of their operations.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Love Program (<i>Programa Amor</i>) †	MIFAN program that supports vulnerable or impoverished children, including children involved in child labor such as street work. Provides educational assistance for children and vocational training for parents. (57) Promotes school attendance, house-to-house and school visits, and extra-curricular activities. (16) Overseen by Nicaragua's Vice President in coordination with MINED, MINSa, MITRAB, and the Ministry of Governance. (57) Allows MIFAN to carry out activities with other government institutions, civil society, and religious organizations, as well as with communities and families. (16) Its Love Program for the Smallest Ones includes children from birth to age 6. (57) Reports indicate this program was active in 2022, and continued to provide services to children. (58)
Educational Bridges (<i>Puentes Educativos</i>) †	MITRAB and MINED public-private partnership implemented by World Vision that provides education to children of coffee workers to prevent child labor during coffee harvests. (59) In 2022, it continued to provide services by providing day care and schooling to children of coffee workers while their parents worked in the field. (5)
School Supply and Meal Programs †	Aim to assist children in the country in an attempt to improve school attendance and completion rates. The Integral School Meal Program (<i>Merienda Escolar</i>) is a MIFAN and WFP initiative that provides children and adolescents with meals at school to address poverty and improve attendance. (60) Reports indicate the government continued to provide school meals through this program in 2022, by providing thousands of quintals of rice, beans, cereals, corn, and other foodstuff products to schools throughout the country. (61,62) National School Supply Program (<i>Paquetes Escolares Solidarios</i>) is a MINED program that distributes packages of school supplies to preschool, primary, and secondary school children in the poorest districts to increase attendance and completion rates. (63) In 2022, the government once again provided over 1 million school supply packages to students and 60,000 briefcases to teachers. (64)

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 Nicaragua.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (9,16,46)

The scope of Nicaragua's social programs is not sufficient to assist children who are subjected to child labor or engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation. (11,18) Although MIFAN coordinates services for child trafficking survivors, including by providing access to education, medical, and legal services, the country still lacks adequate services for human trafficking survivors, such as shelters and specialized services for males and those with disabilities. (19,46,53)

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 Nicaragua (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law is consistent and that the compulsory education age matches the minimum age for work.	2014 – 2022
Enforcement	Employ at least 215 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage of approximately 3.2 million people, especially in rural areas and the informal sector.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that all criminal investigators receive training on child labor and its worst forms.	2019 – 2022
	Collect and publish information on labor law enforcement efforts, including the number of labor inspectors and whether they received training, the number of labor inspections conducted at worksites, the number of child labor violations found for which penalties were imposed and collected, whether routine inspections were conducted and targeted, and if unannounced inspections were conducted.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that the Ministry of Labor has sufficient funding to enforce labor laws, including those related to child labor, and that resource needs are met.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement efforts are sufficient to address the scope of the problem and that agencies have the funding and resources necessary to carry out their duties.	2014 – 2022
	Establish an adequate mechanism for identifying human trafficking victims, particularly children, among high-risk populations.	2018 – 2022
	Publish criminal law enforcement information on efforts related to the worst forms of child labor to allow for the verification of the information.	2021 – 2022
Coordination	Ensure that the National Social Welfare System has a specific and consistent mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor; including with NGOs, is fully funded, and publicly report on these efforts.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that the National Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons works with relevant local stakeholders to address human trafficking issues, and ensure that it establishes a person in the position of Executive Secretariat, as mandated by the Law Against Trafficking in Persons.	2015 – 2022
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the Good Government Plan policy and that data on these activities to address child labor are published during the reporting period.	2009 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish updated data on the prevalence of child labor in the country.	2018 – 2022
	Expand birth registration programs to ensure that children have the necessary documentation required for access to basic services.	2009 – 2022
	Remove barriers to education, such as transportation and the cost associated with school supplies, for all children, particularly those from poor backgrounds and rural areas; improve school infrastructure and access to learning materials.	2009 – 2022
	Implement social programs that address the full scope of the worst forms of child labor in the country, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2009 – 2022
	Develop social services for human trafficking survivors, such as shelters and specialized services, and ensure that services are available throughout the country, especially in areas where children are most vulnerable.	2010 – 2022
	Ensure that civil society organizations and NGOs working on child labor and children's issues are able to carry out their work freely and independently.	2021 – 2022

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