

In 2022, Niger made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government created a new committee to combat forced begging and held a workshop to revise the draft National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. However, children in Niger are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in hereditary slavery and mining, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks herding livestock. The minimum age for work does not meet international standards because it does not apply to children in informal work. In addition, the government made limited efforts to address the ongoing practice of wahaya, a form of child slavery that was upheld as illegal by a Nigerien court in 2019. Lastly, there are persistent gaps in labor law enforcement, including insufficient funding for labor inspectors to conduct inspections.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Niger.

Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	42.9 (2,516,191)
Attending School (%)	7 to 14	48.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	22.1
Primary Completion Rate (%)		57.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, 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), 2012. (2)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children’s work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of rice, fruits, nuts, and vegetables (3-5)
	Herding and caring for livestock, including cattle, sheep, goats, and fowl (5-7)
	Fishing, including river net casting (8)
Industry	Quarrying† and mining† for trona, salt, gypsum, and gold (3,7,9-12)
	Metal work† (13)
	Working in construction,† tanneries,† and slaughterhouses† (3,5,7,12,14)
	Brick making (12)
Services	Street work, including as market vendors, and begging† (3)
	Garbage scavenging (3)
	Domestic work (3,12,15)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,7,9,12)
	Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (7)
	Hereditary and caste-based slavery, including for cattle herding, agricultural work, domestic work, and sexual exploitation (3,7,9,12)
	Forced begging (7,9,16-18)
	Forced labor in domestic work and mining (7,9,12)
	Use in illicit activities, including trafficking drugs (7)

† 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 Niger, especially boys and girls from the Arab, Djerma, Peulh, Tuareg, and Toubou ethnic minorities, continue to be exploited as slaves and endure slavery-like practices, particularly in the regions of Tahoua and Agadez. (3,14) Some children are born into slavery; others are born free but remain in a dependent status and are forced to work with their parents for their former masters in exchange for food, money, and lodging. (5,12,20,21) A particular form of slavery in Niger is the *wahaya* practice, in which men buy girls born into slavery, often between ages 9 and 14, as “fifth wives.” Even though Niger’s Supreme Court set a legal precedent by ruling *wahaya* to be illegal in 2019, the government has made limited efforts to inform the public of the court’s ruling. (3,7,8,22) Child slaves, including those involved in the practice of *wahaya*, are forced to work long hours as cattle herders, agricultural workers, or domestic workers, and are often sexually exploited. (12,23) As with those involved in hereditary slavery, the children of *wahaya* wives are considered slaves, and are passed from one owner to another as gifts or as part of dowries. (6,12,23) During the reporting period, children were also forcibly recruited and used as child soldiers by non-state armed groups. (7)




In Niger, some Koranic teachers known as *marabouts* subject their students, boys known as *talibés*, to manual labor or forced begging rather than providing them with a religious education. (3,7,9) Children in Niger participating in seasonal migration or migrant children from West Africa traveling to Algeria and Libya may also be subject to forced begging or commercial sexual exploitation. (16,18,24-26) In addition, Niger has a form of internal child trafficking called *confiage*, in which family members send their children to live with relatives or friends with promises of better educational or trade learning opportunities. However, some children are instead subjected to exploitation, including forced labor, sex trafficking, and domestic work. (7,12)

Although the Constitution guarantees free education, school fees are often required. A lack of school infrastructure and school materials, and the limited availability of teachers, especially in rural areas, impedes access to education, which may increase the vulnerability of children to child labor. (3,7) Due to insecurity, hundreds of schools were closed during the reporting period. (13)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Niger 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 Niger’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a lack of minimum age protections for children working in the informal economy.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 106 of the Labor Code (27)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 159 of Decree No. 2017-682 (28)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 159–161 and 164–171 of Decree No. 2017-682; Article 181 of the Penal Code (28,29)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 14 of the Constitution; Article 4 and 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Article 270 of the Penal Code; Articles 2 and 10 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (27-31)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Articles 2 and 10 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons; Article 16 of the Law 2015-36 on Illicit Traffic of Migrants (27,28,31,32)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Articles 291 and 292 of the Penal Code; Articles 2 and 10 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (27-29,31)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code; Article 158 of Decree No. 2017-682; Article 181 of the Penal Code; Articles 10 and 16 of the Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (27-29,31)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 107 of the Labor Code (27)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 107 of the Labor Code (27)
Compulsory Education Age	No		Article 8 of Decree No. 2017-935; Article 2 of the Law on the Orientation of the Educational System (33,34)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 23 of the Constitution; Article 8 of Decree No. 2017-935; Article 2 of the Law on the Orientation of the Educational System (30,33,34)

* Country has no conscription (35)

Although the Labor Code establishes age 14 as the minimum age for work, it does not apply to workers in the informal economy, which does not conform to international standards requiring all children to be protected under the law. (27,36) In addition, Article 2 of the Law on the Orientation of the Educational System in Niger guarantees education for all children ages 4 to 18, and Article 8 of Decree No. 2017-935 states that the government is required to promote access to compulsory education, particularly for young girls. However, Niger's law does not clearly articulate to which age groups the latter provision applies, thereby leaving some children at risk of not being covered and increasing the risk of children's involvement in child labor. (33,34)

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 Employment, Labor and Social Security (MELSS)	Enforces labor laws and investigates Labor Code infractions, including those on child and forced labor. Conducts awareness-raising programs to address child labor. (3,26,37)
National Civil Police Force Morals and Minors Brigade	Investigates criminal cases involving minors, including issues pertaining to human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and hereditary slavery. Housed under the Ministry of Interior and Public Security. (3)
National Human Rights Commission	Receives complaints related to child labor, including its worst forms, and conducts investigations of human rights violations, including hereditary slavery. (3,37)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Niger took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Employment, Labor and Social Security (MELSS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of adequate human resources.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (3)	\$90,000 (7)
Number of Labor Inspectors	60 (3)	60 (7)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (27)	Yes (27)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (13)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (3)	117 (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Unknown (7)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Unknown (7)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (27)	Yes (27)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Unknown (7)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (7)

The MELSS's number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Niger's workforce, which includes approximately 9.8 million workers. (3,7,14) While the government reported having 60 labor inspectors, only 10 of them were located in the field carrying out inspections. (7) In addition, the MELSS does not have the necessary funds or resources to be able to carry out inspections in all regions, especially in the informal sector and in remote locations where most child labor occurs. Moreover, although the government did not provide the number of child labor cases found in 2022, the MELSS noted that children are only removed from child labor situations in extreme cases of exploitation, such as child trafficking or forced labor. (3,38)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Niger 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 (3)	No (7)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (3)	Unknown (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (7)

Research found that inadequate resources, including insufficient personnel, funding, and training, hamper the capacity of criminal law enforcement authorities to coordinate and enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (3,39,40) The National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport maintains a hotline to report human trafficking crimes, but the number of calls received by the hotline that involve child trafficking is unknown. Even though the Nigerien Supreme Court ruled the practice of *wahaya* to be illegal in 2019, reinforcing the 2003 Penal Code that prohibits this practice, research found enforcement to

be negligible and that it remains common practice in some parts of the country. (13,29) Furthermore, many victims do not come forward or file complaints against their former masters due to dependency on their former masters and a lack of reintegration services. (5,11)

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 to Combat Child and Forced Labor	Led by MELSS, includes 17 Nigerien ministries and agencies with the purpose of finalizing the next phase of Niger's National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. (3,41) Also intends to develop a new hazardous work list. (3,7,41) During the reporting period, the Committee held a workshop to revise the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. (7)

During the reporting period, Niger created an interministerial committee to combat forced begging, chaired by the Prime Minister's Deputy Chief of Staff. (13,50)

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
National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2019–2023)	Aims to enhance the legal framework to prevent human trafficking, adequately implement the laws, and provide effective protection and care for victims, including children. Led by the National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport. (11,51,52) While it was active during the reporting period, research was unable to determine what activities were undertaken to implement the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons during the reporting period. (13)
National Social Protection Strategy	Aims to improve the quality of, and access to, basic education and health services; includes strategies to address child labor. Overseen by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Child Protection. (53) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Social Protection Strategy during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (42)

Although Niger has adopted the National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor.

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 the problem in all sectors, including agriculture, herding, mining, and caste-based servitude.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Centers for the Prevention, Protection, and Promotion of Persons†	Government program replacing the Judicial and Preventive Education Services, in collaboration with UNICEF, to provide food, shelter, education, and vocational training to street children, many of whom are survivors of child labor. (7,15,47) In 2022, the program continued but research could not find information on its activities or how many of the 54 existing centers continue to be operational.
UNICEF Country Program (2019–2022)	UNICEF-funded program that supported the government's efforts to improve children's education, birth registration rates, and social inclusion, and to strengthen child protection programs, including for children of refugees in the Diffa region. (57-59) The UNICEF Country Program ended in 2022. (3)

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 Niger.

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Although Niger has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the problem, especially in agriculture, herding, mining, and caste-based servitude. Niger also lacks a specific program to assist children exploited by religious instructors. (3,7,9,39) In addition, the resources and facilities available to social services agencies remain inadequate. (3,7,9,39)

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 Niger (Table I I).

Table I I. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law's minimum age for work provisions and protections apply to self-employed children and those in unpaid or non-contractual work.	2015 – 2022
	Establish a compulsory education age equal to the minimum age for work of 14 years.	2016 – 2022
Enforcement	Ensure that inspections and enforcement efforts take place in the informal sector, and in remote locations, where most child labor occurs.	2014 – 2022
	Publish complete information and data on the government's enforcement of child labor laws, including the number of worksite inspections conducted, violations found, and penalties imposed and collected.	2012 – 2022
	Increase resources, including funding and training available to enforcement agencies, increase the number of labor inspectors from 60 to 246 to ensure adequate coverage of a labor force of approximately 9.8 million people, and increase the number of criminal investigators to provide adequate inspection coverage.	2009 – 2022
	Disaggregate complaints made to the National Agency to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migrant Transport's hotline so that the number of complaints related to children is known.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that all survivors of the worst forms of child labor are removed from exploitative situations as appropriate.	2010 – 2022
	Publish complete information on the number of criminal investigations, prosecutions, and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.	2020 – 2022
	Adequately enforce the Nigerien Supreme Court's ruling banning the practice of <i>wahaya</i> .	2019 – 2022
	Ensure that survivors of slavery are returned to their families, and have access to reintegration services, as appropriate, including educational opportunities and counseling.	2020 – 2022
Government Policies	Adopt and implement a national action plan to address child labor, including in hereditary slavery, mining, and agriculture.	2009 – 2022
	Publish information about efforts to implement the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons and the National Social Protection Strategy on an annual basis.	2016 – 2022
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children, including girls, refugees, internally displaced children, and children in rural communities, by increasing school infrastructure, increasing the number of teachers, removing school fees, and providing more school supplies.	2013 – 2022
	Expand the scope of programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, herding, mining, and caste-based servitude.	2009 – 2022
	Implement a program to target and assist children exploited by religious instructors.	2011 – 2022
	Ensure that government social services providers have sufficient resources and facilities to provide the necessary care to all children withdrawn from forced labor and publish information on these activities.	2015 – 2022

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