

In 2022, Paraguay made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government created nine new committees to address child labor at the regional level and passed the National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence 2022–2024, which focuses government efforts to protect children and promote their rights, highlighting child labor as particular violations to the rights of children. In addition, the Public Ministry increased the number of prosecutions initiated of alleged child labor crimes from 47 in 2021 to 69 in 2022. However, children in Paraguay are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic servitude and in debt bondage in cattle raising, on dairy farms, and in charcoal factories. Children with disabilities as well as those from rural and indigenous communities face difficulties accessing and completing their education. In addition, law enforcement agencies lack the funding and resources needed to sufficiently identify, investigate, and prosecute child labor crimes. Social programs also lack the funding and coverage needed to address child labor in rural areas.



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

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

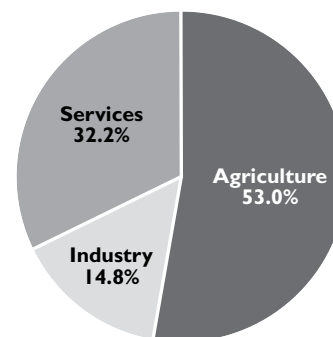
**Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	10 to 14	5.4 (36,569)
Attending School (%)	10 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	10 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		88.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Encuesta Permanente de Hogares Continua (EPHC), 2020. (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	Production of manioc/cassava, corn, beans, peanuts, peppers, sesame, sugarcane, tomatoes, lettuce, melons, sweet potato, onions, carrots, cabbages, yerba mate (stimulant plant), and charcoal (3-5)
	Raising poultry, hogs, cattle,† sheep, and goats and milk production (4)
	Fishing, including using hooks and harpoons,† preparing bait, and cleaning fish† (4)
Industry	Construction, including handling heavy loads, machinery or equipment,† and production of bricks (3,5,6-9)
	Limestone quarrying† (5,8-10)
Services	Domestic work† (3,6,8-13)
	Street work,† including vending, shoe shining, and begging (3,5,6,9,10,12-15)
	Garbage dump scavenging† (9)

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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‡	Debt bondage in cattle raising, dairy farms, and charcoal factories (3,6,8,13,15,16)
	Commercial sexual exploitation (3,6,13-15,17,18)
	Forced domestic work (3,6,10,13)
	Use in the production of child pornography (3,5,6,8,10,13,15,19)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug smuggling and drug trafficking (3,6,8,10,15)

† 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.




*Criadazgo*, a practice in which middle-class and wealthy families informally employ and house child domestic workers from impoverished families, is pervasive in Paraguay. (3,6,13,15,17,18) Many of these children are in situations of domestic servitude, subjected to violence and abuse, and highly vulnerable to sex trafficking. (9,12,14,15,18) Lack of political will continues to prevent Congress from considering previously drafted legislation that would criminalize *criadazgo*, in part because of civil society concerns that a wholesale criminalization of the practice would give rise to a host of new challenges for the children involved. (6,20,21) Children are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation in Ciudad del Este; in the Tri-Border area between Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil; and along commercial shipping routes on the Paraguay-Parana river system. (3,6,13,15,22) In addition, the government has indicated that it is investigating allegations that children are recruited for use in forced labor in the production of marijuana in the Department of Amambay. (3,6,15) Furthermore, children work alongside their parents in debt bondage on cattle ranches, on dairy farms, and in charcoal factories in the remote Chaco region. (3,5,6,8,12,13,15)

Children from rural and indigenous communities face difficulties accessing and completing their education due to language barriers, inadequate facilities and staff, lack of identity documents, and little to no internet connectivity. (3,8,15,23) A study released in 2019 by the Coordinator for the Rights of Infancy and Adolescence of Paraguay estimated that half of all children in indigenous communities do not attend school. (24) Approximately 13 percent of children engaged in child labor in agriculture also do not attend school. (4) Indigenous children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. (18) The government has also noted that girls from rural areas leave school at an earlier age than boys and has estimated that more than 50 percent of children with disabilities could not attend school due to lack of access to public transportation. (5) Such challenges may leave these children more vulnerable to child labor.

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Paraguay 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 Paraguay's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of a prohibition of child recruitment by non-state armed groups.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of Law No. 2332; Article 58 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (25,26)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 54 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 3 of Decree No. 4951; Articles 122 and 125 of the Labor Code; Article 15 of the First Employment Law; Article 5 of Law No. 5407 on Domestic Work (25,27-30)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 54 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 2 of Decree No. 4951; Article 15 of the First Employment Law; Articles 122, 125, and 389 of the Labor Code; Article 5 of Law No. 5407 on Domestic Work (25-31)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 5–7 of the Comprehensive Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 125, 129, 223, and 320 of the Penal Code; Articles 10 and 54 of the Constitution (32-35)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 5, 6, and 7 of the Comprehensive Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 125, 129, and 223 of the Penal Code; Articles 10 and 54 of the Constitution (32-35)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 135 and 223 of the Penal Code; Article 2.19 of Decree No. 4951; Article 31 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (25,27,33,35)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 1 of Law No. 1657; Article 32 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code (25,36)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Articles 3 and 5 of the Obligatory Military Service Law (37,38)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes		Articles 3 and 5 of the Obligatory Military Service Law (37,38)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	17	Article 2 of Law No. 4088; Article 32 of the General Education Law No. 1264; Decree 6162 (39-41)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 76 of the Constitution; Article 32 of the General Education Law No. 1264 (32,39)

Children in Paraguay are required to attend school only up to age 17. This standard makes children age 17 vulnerable to child labor as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work without restriction on hours and times of work. (25,26,39-41)

### 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.

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

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security (MTESS)	Enforces laws related to child labor; inspects workplaces for child labor; and recommends penalties or fines for companies found in violation of labor laws. Refers cases involving criminal violations of child labor to the Ministry of Adolescents and Children (MINNA). (6)
Paraguayan National Police	Maintain a special unit of 40 police officers known as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Unit, which handles trafficking in persons complaints, including in relation to children. Maintain offices in five cities across the country. (42)
Public Ministry (Attorney General)	Investigates and prosecutes criminal cases of forced child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and use of children in illicit activities. (3,15) Maintains the Specialized Unit to Combat Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents. (8) Comprises 5 specialized prosecutors based in Asunción and 44 assistants. (42)

### Labor Law Enforcement

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

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$119,089 (6)	\$119,089 (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	25 (6)	23 (3)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (43)	Yes (43)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	N/A (6)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	1,177 (44)	1,766 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	9 (6)	15 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	13 (6)	11 (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	4 (6)	5 (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (6)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (43)	Yes (43)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (6)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (3)

Research indicated that Paraguay does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties (3,45,46) Government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and labor organizations agree that inadequate funding for resources like transportation, fuel, and necessary office facilities, as well as the insufficient number of labor inspectors, hamper the labor inspectorate's capacity to enforce child labor laws, especially in the informal sector, including in agriculture and domestic work, and particularly in rural areas such as the Chaco region. (3,5,13,15) Moreover, the MTESS, other government agencies, and NGOs agree that labor inspectors receive useful and necessary training, but that inspectors could benefit from more training specific to child labor. (6,13,15) An additional constraint to labor law enforcement is the lack of efficient and timely cooperation by judicial authorities in granting workplace inspection search warrants to the Public Ministry and the MTESS when an employer does not permit an inspector to enter a workplace to conduct an inspection. (3,13,15) Research was unable to determine whether the government has implemented a 2016 agreement with judicial and law enforcement authorities that would accelerate the authorization of search warrants.

### Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Paraguay 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 a lack of resources to sufficiently identify, investigate, and prosecute cases 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	N/A (6)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	170 <sup>†</sup> (6)	171 <sup>‡</sup> (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	47 (6)	69 (3)
Number of Convictions	24 (6)	Unavailable (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (6)	Unavailable (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (3)

<sup>†</sup> Number of investigations conducted between January and November 2021.

<sup>‡</sup> Number of investigations conducted between January and November 2022.

During the reporting period, investigators received several trainings on trafficking in persons as it relates to child labor, including a Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency-funded course on trafficking in persons, three EU-funded trainings on trafficking in persons, and a training funded by Partners of the Americas on assessing damages to survivors of human trafficking. (3) Paraguay also increased the number of prosecutions relating to child labor from 47 in 2021 to 69 in 2022. (3,18) Despite these efforts, government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and labor organizations have observed a nationwide need for more specialized prosecutors to support local prosecutors and increase the Public Ministry’s ability to investigate and prosecute cases involving human trafficking. (11) In addition, Paraguay’s criminal law enforcement agencies lack resources like funding and fuel to sufficiently identify, investigate, and prosecute cases of the worst forms of child labor, especially in remote areas. Moreover, inconsistent application of fines and criminal penalties remain significant challenges in the elimination of the worst forms of child labor. (6,15)

### 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 insufficient financial and human resources.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor and Protect Adolescent Labor	Leads government efforts against child labor and includes representatives from MTESS, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, MINNA, and other government agencies, and labor union representatives, industry associations, and NGOs. (47) The commission met four times during the reporting period to facilitate interagency communication and to refer cases to the appropriate agencies. (3) Coordination between MTESS and the Ministries of Education and Health remains insufficient to address the worst forms of child labor. (8,17)

Despite new efforts to facilitate greater coordination between agencies, interagency communication was lacking during the reporting period. (3,17) In addition, because of this inefficiency, coordination bodies have been unable to gather and report relevant data on child labor. (17) Further, coordination bodies have reported a lack of financial and human resources needed to fulfill their mission of addressing child labor. (8,17,48)

### V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

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

Policy	Description & Activities
National Strategy for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of Working Adolescents (2019–2024)	Focuses on raising awareness and strengthening enforcement of child labor laws. Provides child laborers with access to free quality education and offers livelihood alternatives for their families. (8,49) In 2022, nine new Departmental Committees for the Eradication of Child Labor were created under the strategy to carry out activities at the local level. (3,50)
The National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence (2022–2024)†	Focuses the protection of children and adolescents on four main axis points: (1) strengthening the protective role of the family; (2) comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents, including labor rights; (3) promotion and communication of the rights of children and adolescents; and (4) strengthening the national system's ability to protect and promote the rights of children. Each point mentioned in the plan is supplemented by a number of strategic objectives, including the expansion of protection programs linked to child labor and its worst forms, identification of high-risk situations that can lead to instances of child labor, and strengthening of health and education services. (3,51)
National Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (2020–2024)	Aims to guide government prevention, response, and protection actions and establish prosecution and penalty guidelines for trafficking in persons. Also prioritizes institutional capacity building and coordination between government entities. (15,52,53) During the reporting period, Paraguay continued to implement the national action plan by building the capacity of government officials to prevent trafficking in persons. (18)

† 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 inadequate coverage and funding to fully address the problem in all sectors.

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

Program	Description & Activities
Immediate Response Network†	Program created to provide support to street children. Under the " <i>Dispositivo de Respuesta Inmediata</i> ," MINNA employees with a range of specializations, including psychologists and social workers, respond to tips from the MINNA hotline for reporting mistreatment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and negligence of children, as well as information from roving street patrols in high-risk areas. (3,13) During the reporting period, the Immediate Response Network continued to respond to calls into their MINNA hotline and continued to refer at risk children to the appropriate government services. (54,55)
Embrace Program ( <i>Programa Abrazo</i> )†	MINNA program to assist children engaged in exploitative work by providing them and their families with health and education services, food deliveries, and cash transfers conditioned on children's school attendance and withdrawal from work. (6,8) Currently operates 53 attention centers in 12 of Paraguay's 17 departments, benefitting more than 10,000 children. (3) During the reporting period, two Embrace Program Care Centers opened in Pilar and Santa María de Fe. These centers provide vulnerable children and their families with the Embrace Program's services. (56,57) The centers had over 100 children registered for assistance at the time of opening. (56,57)
Well-Being Conditional Cash Transfer Program ( <i>Tekoporā</i> )†	Government-administered program through the Ministry of Social Development. Provides conditional cash transfers to families in rural communities. (6) Incorporates aspects of the Embrace Program, such as the family monitoring methodology, to ensure that participant children do not engage in child labor. (58) During the reporting period, the Government of Paraguay announced an additional payment to existing <i>Tekoporā</i> beneficiaries. A total of 177,000 families will receive 40 percent of what they are given bimonthly for this additional payment. (59)

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 Paraguay.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (8,13,60,61)

In 2022, the MTESS carried out a number of awareness campaigns including the new "Child Labor Eradication" awareness campaign. (3) The Ministry of Women's Affairs also made improvements to its shelters to create a more comfortable environment for survivors of trafficking. The Ministry of Women's Affairs also updated its procedures regarding home visits to support reintegration of survivors who have left shelters. (18)

The 2012 Law Against Trafficking in Persons requires the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to provide compensation and financial assistance to survivors of sex and labor trafficking, including minors, but NGO and government officials report that compensation takes too long to be helpful. (11,22,34) Although Paraguay has programs that target child labor, the coverage and funding of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, and programs are limited by the absence of government funding in education and health services in rural areas. Additional programs are needed to reach the large numbers of working children, especially in agriculture, including cattle herding, and domestic work. (5,11,15) Civil society has also stated the need for public outreach and education campaigns to provide children and their families with additional information on *criadazgo*. (21)

## 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 Paraguay (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Increase the compulsory education age from 17 years old to 18 years old to align with the minimum age for work.	2021 – 2022
	Draft and enact legislation to protect children from labor abuse under <i>criadazgo</i> , a practice in which middle-class and wealthy families informally employ and house child domestic workers from impoverished families.	2019 – 2022
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 23 to 249 to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 3.7 million people.	2009 – 2022
	Provide office facilities, transportation, fuel, and increased funding to the labor inspectorate, specifically in the Chaco region, to build enforcement capacity to address child labor in the informal sector, including in agriculture and domestic work.	2009 – 2022
	Implement the 2016 agreement to accelerate authorization of workplace inspection search warrants to improve the cooperation mechanisms between judicial authorities and labor enforcement officials.	2013 – 2022
	Publish information on the number of convictions achieved and penalties imposed related to child labor crimes.	2020 – 2022
	Increase efforts to prosecute crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including by hiring and training specialized criminal investigators and prosecutors.	2012 – 2022
	Provide increased resources, such as funding and fuel for law enforcement vehicles, to enable increased criminal investigations in remote areas.	2012 – 2022
	Ensure that fines and penalties for those convicted of child labor crimes are consistently applied.	2019 – 2022
Coordination	Provide additional financial and human resources to all coordinating mechanisms so that they can fulfill their mandate, which includes collecting and reporting on child labor statistics and addressing child labor issues.	2018 – 2022
	Strengthen interagency coordinating mechanisms, with particular focus on the communication between the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security and the Ministries of Education and Health, to address child labor, including its worst forms.	2013 – 2022
Social Programs	Increase access to education for children vulnerable to child labor, particularly children with disabilities, young girls, and children with language barriers living in rural and indigenous communities, by addressing the lack of identity documents, infrastructure, staff, internet connectivity, and transportation.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that financial assistance programs for child trafficking and forced labor survivors are properly funded.	2018 – 2022
	Further expand government programs to assist more families and children affected by child labor in agriculture in rural areas, including cattle herding, and domestic work.	2010 – 2022
	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2022
	Create public outreach and education campaigns to provide youth and their families with more information on <i>criadazgo</i> .	2022

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