

In 2022, Suriname made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The National Commission on Combating Child Labor translated television and radio programs into six languages and held awareness-raising sessions on child labor. The government also increased the number of convictions it secured for child labor crimes and signed bilateral and regional enforcement arrangements with French Guiana, Brazil, and Guyana that included language on joint efforts to combat cross-border criminal activities, including human trafficking. In addition, the government launched a program to provide inclusive access to all levels of education, with a specific focus on children in the interior and improving the quality of lower secondary education. However, children in Suriname 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 gold mining. The compulsory education age does not reach the minimum age for employment, leaving some children vulnerable to labor exploitation. In addition, while Suriname's laws criminalize sexual acts with a minor under 16, they do not criminally prohibit the use of a child under 16 for commercial sex. The government did not report the number of child labor inspections it conducted.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	7.2 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	7.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		80.4

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 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2018. (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	Harvesting crops and applying pesticides† (3,4)
	Forestry† (3,5,6)
	Fishing and hunting (5,6)
Industry	Gold mining† (3-6)
	Construction† (3,4)
	Wood processing† (3,7)
Services	Street work, including vending (3,5)
	Domestic work (5)
	Airport luggage transportation† (8)

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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 (4,6,8)

† 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.

Children are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, including in informal mining camps in Suriname's remote interior. (7,9,10) In the capital of Paramaribo, children engage primarily in street vending. In addition, children work in small-scale gold mines in the southeast region of the country, in which they risk exposure to mercury and cyanide. (7) Children have also been reported to be working in small-scale construction and wood processing companies outside Paramaribo. (7,11) Migrant populations, especially those with irregular status residing in the country, are particularly vulnerable to both sex and labor trafficking due to challenges associated with their precarious legal status. (12,13) Children also resort to selling goods along busy roadways and take on informal jobs in other sectors, leaving them vulnerable and exposed to dangerous equipment, chemicals, and unregulated working conditions. (3)




Although Suriname’s net attendance percentage for primary school is high, it drops significantly for secondary school. Research indicates that there are disparities in education completion rates based on geographic and socioeconomic status, and that secondary school completion rates in the interior are as low as 15 percent. (14) Limited economic opportunities and inequality require children to work rather than continue their education (3,15,14) Children in the interior faced more barriers to education as many schools in the region opened significantly later than schools in the coastal area after nation-wide COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were lifted. These schools also did not develop adequate plans to ensure that students caught up on materials and classes missed due to the pandemic. (3) Furthermore, flooding in the interior led to additional school closures, and the high cost of transportation was an obstacle for attendance. (3,16)

Although children who are not citizens of Suriname can access free public education if they provide a birth certificate and vaccination records, there is limited reporting of instances in which children were denied access to education due to incomplete paperwork or their citizenship and residency status. These cases were reported among the Guyanese population in Suriname’s western border district, Nickerie, and the Brazilian population in Paramaribo. (3,8,17,18) Research suggests that families residing illegally in the country have also kept their children out of school to avoid being reported to authorities. (3)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Suriname 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 Suriname's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including an age for compulsory education that is less than the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Articles 1 (j–l), 3, and 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act (19)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 1 (k and l) and 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act; Article 1 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth (19,20)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 2 and 3 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth; Article 11 of the Children and Youth Persons Labor Act (19,20)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 334, 338, and 339 of the Penal Code; Article 15 of the Constitution; Article 1 of Law on Labor for Children and Young Persons (19,21,22)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 307 and 334 of the Penal Code (22)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Articles 291, 293, 297, 298, 303a, and 306 of the Penal Code (22)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 9 of the Conscription Act (23)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	12	Article 39 of the Constitution; Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education (21,24)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 38 and 39 of the Constitution (21)

* Country has no conscription (25)

Suriname's laws do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children because while it is criminal to have a sexual relationship with a child under the age of 16, the use of a child under age 16 for commercial sex is not criminally prohibited. In addition, while the Penal Code establishes penalties for the production and trafficking of drugs, it does not specifically prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child in the production and trafficking of drugs. (22) Moreover, Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education requires children to attend school only until they are 12 years old. (24) This makes children ages 12 to 16 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are not legally required to attend school nor are they legally permitted to work.

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 Opportunity and Youth Affairs (MOL)	Enforces laws related to child labor. (3,4) Reports suspected forced labor cases, including the worst forms of child labor, within 45 minutes of identification to the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Unit of the Suriname Police Force. (4) Contains the Labor Inspectorate, which is required to report alleged cases of child labor and forced labor to the police. (3)
Suriname Police Force	Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. (3) Includes the Youth Affairs Police, who cover law enforcement involving children under age 18 and are jointly responsible for child labor-related crimes. Also includes the TIP Unit, which investigates reports and allegations of human trafficking and forced sexual exploitation nationwide, including cases involving children. (7,11,26) The TIP Unit scaled up its collaboration with the Immigration Unit of the Military Police to support the identification of suspected cases arriving at the Johan Adolf Pengel International Airport. During the reporting period, the TIP Unit scheduled two trips to the interior, where it conducted inspections of night clubs in mining areas, provided awareness sessions on human trafficking and smuggling, and established collaborations with local and tribal leadership. (27) The TIP Unit along with representatives of the Prosecutors' Office regularly inspect clubs and brothels. (27)
Prosecutor's Office	Investigates and prosecutes human trafficking cases, and enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (3,4) The TIP Desk of the Prosecutors' Office works closely with the TIP Unit of the Police during the investigation of cases. (27)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Suriname took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial resources.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	50 (8)	50 (3)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (28)	Yes (28)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	2,423 (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (8)	0 (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (29)	Yes (29)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (3)

During the reporting period, the MOL increased its collaboration with the District Commissioner's Office of Brokopondo and trained staff at that office to conduct labor inspections on its behalf. The Ministry has been collaborating with different community organizations and is seeking their support in identifying potential instances of child labor. (3) In December, the Brazil School for Labor Inspection gave a 2-day training on data generation, labor inspection, local coordination between stakeholders as it relates to child labor, and the execution of the national policy to combat child labor. Participants in the training included labor inspectors, members of the National Commission to Combat Child Labor, representatives from the Ministry of Social Affairs, representatives from labor unions, representatives from a gold mining company, and staff from the District Commissioner's Office of Brokopondo. (3)

No data on the number of labor inspections were provided for the reporting period, but the MOL confirmed that the number of inspections decreased significantly compared to 2021 as the COVID-19 Cluster Team, which was led by the labor inspectorate, was disbanded. (3) The labor inspectorate lacked both sufficient inspectors and

equipment to conduct necessary labor inspections. (3,4,15) Most inspections were unannounced, in the formal sector, and centered around the coastal area. Labor inspectors check for child labor in targeted sectors and must be accompanied by police with a special warrant to inspect private homes or farms. No children were removed from child labor as a result of inspections during the reporting period. (3)

In June, a review of the reciprocal referral mechanism was conducted and identified several obstacles, including that the mechanism is not sufficient to provide long-term solutions to child labor issues that are reported. (3,8) The Ministries of Social Affairs and Labor, with support of UNICEF and other stakeholders, began drafting new policies to strengthen referral mechanisms. (3)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Suriname 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 the 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	No (8)	No (3)
Number of Investigations	2 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	11 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Convictions	0 (8)	10 (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (8)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (3)

In July, the police launched a website that provides information on human trafficking and smuggling, updates on activities of the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Unit, and the opportunity to report suspected cases. (3,27) Suriname also signed bilateral and regional enforcement arrangements with French Guiana, Brazil, and Guyana that included language on joint efforts to combat cross-border criminal activities, including human trafficking. (27,30) Additionally, Suriname participated in a 5-day INTERPOL operation for trafficking in persons in the Lawa area, along the border with French Guiana, and at checkpoints leading to the interior. However, in July, Suriname removed the visa requirements for entry from all countries, which makes immigration officials' pre-arrival screening, including for indicators of human trafficking, difficult. (13,27) During the reporting period, members of the TIP Unit and other police officials received a refresher training course with support from the Prosecutors' Office. However, initial training on issues related to the worst forms of child labor was not provided to new criminal investigators. (3)

In 2022, three police officials accused of direct involvement in the trafficking of two female children in 2021 were prosecuted under laws other than the anti-trafficking in persons law. Two were found guilty and received prison sentences of 12 months, while one was acquitted. (3,27) There were no new investigations concerning the worst forms of child labor. (3) The number of investigators is insufficient to respond to human trafficking cases, and the Prosecutor's Office reported that investigations are initiated primarily as a result of complaints filed and are limited by a lack of resources. (31)

The TIP Unit reported that the police made funding available from their budget to support the establishment of emergency shelter accommodations but noted the funding was not sufficient. (3) Both the TIP Unit of the Police as well as the TIP Desk at the Prosecutors' Office reported a need for more resources to do their jobs efficiently and effectively, especially in the interior of the country. (27) The TIP Unit has 11 members who cover all human trafficking and human smuggling cases for the entire country, which is insufficient staffing to adequately conduct its functions. (3,27) Initial investigations on trafficking are usually conducted by regular police who receive human trafficking training as part of the basic curricula. Research found that the government did not effectively identify trafficking in persons victims among children, migrants in the interior, and in brothels operating within private homes. (9)

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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 Commission on Combating Child Labor (NCCUK)	Serves as the lead body drafting child labor policies. (10) Coordinates and monitors efforts to address child labor, including the execution of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor. Also coordinates with the Integrated Child Protection Network to maximize awareness-raising efforts. (11) Mandate is valid through December 2023. (3,8) MOL approved the appointment of a special child labor rapporteur per the recommendation of NCCUK in 2021. (3) During the reporting period, NCCUK translated television and radio awareness programs into six languages and released these through different stations across the country. Funding for this project came from UNICEF. (3) Translated flyers into 3 languages and printed 1,000 flyers to be distributed to community organizations, schools, NGOs, and businesses. Worked with different stakeholders, including the Ministry of Social Affairs, on the evaluation and reorganization of and amendments to the integrated referral system. (3)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

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

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor (2019–2024)	Aims to address child labor by removing children from child labor, and by addressing issues that lead children to become involved in child labor, including poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Also addresses the social and educational reintegration of these children. (11) Annual plan identifies 21 activities that the National Commission on Combating Child Labor intends to work on through the end of 2022. (8) Multiple activities included under this plan are currently in progress. (3)

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

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of existing social programs to fully address the scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Decent Work Country Program	ILO program that supports capacity building of the Labor Inspectorate and constituents, as well as of the National Commission on Combating Child Labor for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the National Action Plan. (32) In September, the government ILO agreed to the implementation of a third phase of the Decent Work Country Program, which will aim to focus more on creating job opportunities, especially in developing sectors of the economy such as the oil and gas. (3)
My Line (<i>Mi Lijn</i>)†	Government-run, 24-hour hotline that provides confidential advice to children in need, including victims of the worst forms of child labor, victims of domestic violence, and persons in need of mental support. The initiative continued to operate during the reporting period. (3,8)
Consolidating Access to Quality and Inclusive Education in Suriname*	Government program, supported by the Inter-American Development Bank that began an initiative with the goal of providing inclusive access to all levels of education in Suriname, with a specific focus on children in the interior and improving the quality of lower secondary education. Began in November 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 was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Suriname.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (7)

In 2022, the government launched a social program to expand access to education in underserved areas and continued to support initiatives to eradicate child labor, but existing social programs are inadequate to fully address the problem in all sectors, including in agriculture and mining. (3)

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 Suriname (Table I I).

Table I I. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Increase the compulsory education age from 12 to at least age 16, the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the military recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including the use of a child under age 16 for prostitution.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2022
Enforcement	Publish information on Labor Inspectorate funding.	2012 – 2022
	Publish data on worksite inspections.	2022
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate and the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force are sufficiently funded and adequately staffed to cover labor inspections in both the formal and informal sectors of the labor force, including in risk-prone sectors, such as in fisheries, mining, and agricultural areas in which child labor is likely to occur, particularly in the interior of the country.	2014 – 2022
	Provide mandatory training on the worst forms of child labor to new criminal investigators.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that there are sufficient resources, including for travel to the interior of the country, and inspectors to proactively investigate human trafficking cases.	2022
	Ensure that the child labor referral system can adequately provide long-term solutions, including housing, to child labor cases that are reported to it.	2021 – 2022
Social Programs	Develop social programs to prevent and eradicate child labor in agriculture and mining.	2015 – 2022
	Strengthen social services to assist child victims of human trafficking, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2014 – 2022
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers to education, particularly for children in the interior, by eliminating school-related fees, reducing transportation costs, increasing access to schools in remote locations, improving teacher availability, removing requirements for documentation, and covering material missed during school closures.	2020 – 2022
	Ensure that all children, including children of foreign-born parents, have access to free public education regardless of citizenship and residency status, and that school registration is not used to report families without proper residential status.	2021 – 2022

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