

In 2022, Vanuatu made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the government partnered with the United Nations Children's Fund to launch several child protection programs. This included establishing a free 24/7 child helpline to connect callers with trained child protection offices to report concerns. Additionally, the National Child Protection Referral Pathway guidance document was released, which outlined the roles for different stakeholders and service providers to support children, including psychosocial support. Lastly, the government streamlined the issuance of national identification cards for children. Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Vanuatu are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks in forestry and logging. Vanuatu's minimum age for hazardous work, 15, is below the international standard of age 18. Vanuatu also lacks a referral mechanism between criminal authorities and social services providers.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Vanuatu. 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	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		101.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2023. (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	Forestry, including logging (3,4)
Services	Street vending, including selling newspapers (3,5)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced domestic work (4) Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,6,7)

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

Vanuatu lacks data to determine the nature and prevalence of child labor in the country, including in forestry and logging. (5,8,9) However, children are often seen selling newspapers on the street, but the government does not consider this to be an activity that should be regulated. (3) Furthermore, children living in remote areas face difficulties accessing education, increasing the risk of children's involvement in child labor. (10) In 2022, the Government of Vanuatu, in partnership with UNICEF, conducted a national survey on the state of inclusive education. (11) The survey found that there is no budget allocated to support inclusive education, and that almost all schools lack sanitation and menstrual hygiene management facilities that are accessible and safe for all. (11,12) Vanuatu's Education School Fee Grant Program has been implemented by the government with the

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goal of reducing the financial burden parents face when sending their children to school. (13) This has led to an increase in enrollment, but has also created the need for improved infrastructure and teacher training. (3) Although this effort has been made, approximately 50 percent of children still drop out of the education system due to inadequate programs and facilities and limited capacity of schools to accommodate all children. (3)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Vanuatu has ratified most 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 Vanuatu's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a failure to criminalize the use of children in illicit activities.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Section 38 and 39 of the Employment Act (14)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No	15	Section 40 of the Employment Act (14)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		Section 40 of the Employment Act (14)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 7 and 78(2) of the Employment Act; Section 102 of the Penal Code; Sections 2, 34, and 35 of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime Act (14-16)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Section 35 of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime Act (15)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Sections 101B–D of the Penal Code; Section 2 and 35 of the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime Act (15,16)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Section 35 of the Penal Code (16)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
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		
Free Public Education	No		

† Country has no standing military (17)

Vanuatu's existing legal framework governing child labor does not meet international standards on a number of fronts. Vanuatu's hazardous work prohibitions do not comply with international standards that require all children under age 18 to be protected from work that could jeopardize their health and safety. Furthermore, Vanuatu has yet to determine by law the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. (14, 18, 19) In addition, the Employment Act permits children under the age of 12 to perform light work in agricultural undertakings owned and managed by their own families, without requiring that the undertaking not have other employees and be for local consumption only; the Employment Act also permits children ages 12 and 13 to work in light agricultural work and domestic work, but it does not specify the activities or hours per week that are allowed. (14) In addition, the Penal Code does not include heightened penalties for inducing children to engage in illicit activities, including in drug production and drug trafficking. (16)

Vanuatu also lacks a compulsory education policy, increasing the risk of children's involvement in child labor. (7, 18) However, although Vanuatu does not have free public education, the School Grant Program provides all schools with a grant of up \$75 (VT9,000) per student. Additionally, Secondary School Tuition Fee Subsidies of \$355 (VT42,000) are paid to the school to support students in grades 7 through 10. (13)

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
Department of Labor	Enforces provisions set forth in the Employment Act, including child labor laws. (8,20)
Vanuatu Police Force	Enforces all criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor and collaborates with the Vanuatu Tourism Office to address commercial sexual exploitation of children. Prosecutes child labor cases. (3,7)
National Intelligence Unit	Operates under the Vanuatu Police Force. Is the designated lead and enforces Vanuatu's trafficking in persons laws, including possible commercial sexual exploitation of children as a result of human trafficking. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, research did not find information on whether labor law enforcement agencies in Vanuatu took actions to address child labor (Table 6).

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	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (14)	Yes (14)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (14)	Yes (14)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Unknown (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)

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The Government of Vanuatu did not respond to requests for information on its labor law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report. However, research indicates that the Child Desk, under the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, does not have adequate financial and human resources to develop and integrate child protection policies into national planning initiatives. (8,9) Although the number of labor inspectors is unknown, research indicates that Vanuatu does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (3,21)

Vanuatu does not have a formal mechanism for reporting and responding to children who need protection. (3) Most cases of child labor in the country are dealt with by *Kastom* (an informal method individuals use to settle disputes), and although anyone can report a crime, research found that police are more likely to investigate if the victims themselves report their allegations. After a case is reported by the victim, the police are mandated to investigate the allegations and bring evidence to the public prosecutor for trial. (3,22) Although *Kastom* is a common mechanism used to address child protection issues, research has found no established interagency protocols and procedures between *Kastom* and governmental offices—including the Vanuatu Police Force—to sufficiently coordinate and ensure that child protection services are provided. (5,8,20)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Vanuatu took actions to address child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown (8)	Unknown (3)

The Government of Vanuatu did not respond to requests for information on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report. However, research found that the Vanuatu Police Force enforced criminal laws against child labor and human trafficking, while the Vanuatu Tourism Office, Police Force, and Department of Labor dealt with matters of commercial sexual exploitation. (3) The Police Force, Tourism Office, and Department of Labor fall under different government ministries, and interagency coordination on human trafficking investigations between law enforcement agencies was primarily ad hoc. (3,23) Although the police have established standard operating procedures to attend to child victims, there is no formal referral mechanism between the police and social services. (3,5,20) Reporting shows that inspectors in Vanuatu do not receive anti-human trafficking trainings, and due to a lack of dedicated funds and training on the country's anti-trafficking policy, trafficking investigations are constrained. (4,22)

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 efforts to address all forms of child labor.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Child Protection Working Group	Serves as the primary forum for exchanging information on child protection and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Chaired by the Director General of the Ministry of Justice and Community Services, and comprises representatives from the government, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and NGOs. (20,24-26) According to its Terms of Reference, it has a role in capacity building, systems strengthening, emergency preparedness and response, and coordination of services across all child protection sectors. (8,9) Additionally, although the government has established the National Child Protection Working Group, there have been no indications of any initiatives or activities to implement policies to prevent and eliminate child labor. (3)

In 2022, the National Child Protection Referral Pathway guidance document was released, which outlines the roles of different stakeholders and service providers for support provided to children, such as psychosocial support, access to healthcare, and access to safety and justice. (27)

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 implementation of the National Children Protection Policy.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
National Child Protection Policy (2016–2026)	Aims to protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Provides children with equitable access to services supporting reintegration and recovery when needed. (3,7,25) However, the lack of a dedicated budget as well as staffing and funding issues in the offices responsible for implementation are major challenges to the effectiveness of the policy. (3,5) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.
United Nations Pacific Strategy (2018–2022)	Aimed to address, develop, and implement strategic economic development priorities in the South Pacific through a multinational framework comprising 14 South Pacific Nations. Included in their priorities were the elimination of child labor, and the worst forms of child labor. (28) Research was also unable to determine what actions were taken to implement the United Nations Pacific Strategy during the reporting period.

There is no register of civil society organizations tasked with protecting children, and social services providers are not required to be registered with the state. Furthermore, there are no standards or requirements that child protection agents or social services providers must follow when addressing children's issues. (5,8,25)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including inadequate efforts to address child labor in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Education School Fee Grant†	Funded by the Government of Vanuatu's Ministry of Education; provides funding directly to schools. The funds support students of all grade levels, including students in Years 1 through 6, to offset education costs. (13) The grant program was active in 2022 with funds being disbursed to schools in three installments throughout the year. These grant amounts ranged from \$69 to \$76 per student, depending on their grade level. (13) Research was unable to determine whether the Vanuatu Education School Fee Grant program included child labor elimination policies or efforts.
Education and Training Sector Strategic Plan (2021–2030)	A strategic plan to strengthen the education sector in Vanuatu, including the education budget and monitoring of expenses. (29) Provides access to education to all children in Vanuatu. Implements quality infrastructure based on needs. (29) Reduces the number of out-of-school children and identifies children studying at the incorrect grade level. (29) The strategic plan was active during 2022. (30)

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 Vanuatu.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (27)

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In July, 2022, Vanuatu's Ministry of Justice and Community Services, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and UNICEF partnered to launch an array of new child protection initiatives, one of which was the creation and issuance of children's national identification cards. (27) Vanuatu's Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Internal Affairs have stated the objective of the initiative is to provide legal recognition of children's identity which will help protect them from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. (27) Children can now apply for the new national identification cards in the national capital, Port Vila, or at registration offices in all provinces. (31) During the reporting period, the government also established the free Child (*Pikinini*) Helpline, allowing anyone to report concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child by calling 163. The helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is staffed by trained child protection officers. (27) However, during the reporting period, the government of Vanuatu did not implement any social programs that directly addressed preventing or eliminating child labor.

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 Vanuatu (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2014 – 2022
	Raise the minimum age for hazardous work from 15 to 18, to comply with international standards.	2016 – 2022
	Determine by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children after consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the law protects children ages 12 and 13 employed in light agricultural work by specifying the activities and hours per week that are allowed.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure that the law includes heightened penalties for the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Establish by law an age up to which education is compulsory that extends to the minimum age for work.	2016 – 2022
	Establish by law provision of free basic public education.	2016 – 2022
Enforcement	Publish information on labor law enforcement efforts undertaken, including the number of labor inspectors, labor inspectorate funding, the number and type of labor inspections conducted, violations found, and penalties imposed and collected.	2012 – 2022
	Employ at least 3 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 108,000 people.	2021 – 2022
	Train labor inspectors and criminal investigators on anti-human trafficking and enforcement of child labor laws and make the results of these efforts public.	2014 – 2022
	Publish information on the number of criminal law enforcement efforts undertaken, including the number of investigations conducted, violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions made, and penalties imposed.	2012 – 2022
	Strengthen coordination and sufficiently fund referral mechanisms between the Department of Labor, the Vanuatu Police Force, the Vanuatu Tourism office, and social welfare services to protect and rehabilitate children involved in child labor, including its worst forms.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that the Child Desk has adequate financial and human resources to develop and integrate national planning initiatives for child protection policies.	2019 – 2022
	Ensure that all complaints of child labor are investigated, regardless of who lodges the complaint.	2019 – 2022
	Establish interagency protocols and a referral and coordination mechanism between <i>Kastom</i> and government child protection services.	2018 – 2022
	Establish formal interagency coordination on human trafficking investigations between law enforcement agencies, including the Police Force, Tourism Office, and Department of Labor.	2022
	Coordination	Ensure that the National Child Protection Working Group takes meaningful action to implement policies to prevent and eliminate child labor.

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor and publish results from activities implement during the reporting period.	2022
	Ensure that all policies are allocated funding and implemented as intended to address all relevant worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that social services providers and civil society organizations are registered and follow a standard set of procedures in providing care to vulnerable children.	2019 – 2022
	Publish information regarding actions undertaken to implement the National Child Protection Policy.	2022
	Publish information regarding actions undertaken to implement the United Nations Pacific Strategy.	2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs, including in forestry logging, and street vending, such as selling newspapers.	2014 – 2022
	Increase access to education for all children, including by funding inclusive education, increasing access for remote students, improving facilities to accommodate all children, improving infrastructure, particularly in sanitation, and expanding teacher training.	2012 – 2022
	Ensure that the Education School Fee Grant is sufficiently funded and contains child labor elimination policies or efforts.	2018 – 2022
	Implement and support social programs that directly address preventing and eliminating child labor.	2022

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