

BENIN

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Benin made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government partnered with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes to train judges, police officers, and social workers on technical and legal frameworks and tools for detecting, investigating, and prosecuting cases related to child trafficking. It also cooperated with the Governments of Gabon, Togo, the Republic of Congo, and the International Criminal Police Organization in the repatriation of child survivors across international borders. Several policies were also under development to address child labor in 2023, including a roadmap for Benin's integration into the International Labor Organization's Alliance 8.7, sector-specific action plans to combat child labor in mining and quarrying and in child domestic labor. However, the government does not meet its international agreements on education, as it does not provide universal free basic education for a minimum of nine years. In addition, inadequate funding for the labor inspectorate may impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. Finally, due to the lack of a unified digitized data collection system, cases are recorded on paper and researched in person, creating challenges in compiling and sharing law enforcement information.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	25.7% (Unavailable)
Boys		27.9%
Girls		23.3%
Urban		17.3%
Rural		31.3%

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	44.8% (Unavailable)
Boys		49.5%
Girls		40.4%
Urban		32.2%
Rural		55.1%
Attending School	5 to 14	70.1%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	18.5%

Children in Benin are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in the production of cotton. Children also perform dangerous tasks in domestic work, street vending, and the production of crushed granite.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Production of cotton, including exposure to pesticides.†



Industry

Quarrying granite; including lifting heavy objects; collecting,† crushing,† and sieving† stones and gravel; working at elevated heights without protection. Washing† and sieving† in mining.



Services

Domestic work† and work in the transportation industry.† Street work, including vending and begging. Working in restaurants and bars.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Forced labor in domestic work, handicraft activities, and street work including vending and begging. Forced labor in agriculture, including in the production of cotton. Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking, selling smuggled gasoline on roadsides, and illegally selling alcohol, cigarettes, and pharmaceutical products on the street. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

† 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.



SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Benin's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Establish by law 9 years of free, compulsory education, including lower secondary education.

Increase the compulsory education age from 11 years to 14 years to align with the minimum age for work.

Enforcement

Increase the number of labor inspectors from 72 to 120 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 4.8 million workers.

Increase funding for the labor inspectorate to conduct comprehensive nationwide investigations, including in sectors with a high prevalence of child labor, such as mining, quarrying, fishing, and domestic work.

Allow the labor inspectorate to freely conduct inspections in the agriculture sector.

Ensure that labor inspections are not impeded by requirement to conduct them by committee of labor inspectors, policy officers, and social workers.

Establish a unified electronic data collection system to compile and share law enforcement information on all worst forms of child labor between the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security's Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking.

Publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of perpetrators convicted and whether penalties were imposed for worst forms of child labor crimes.

Extend the Central Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking's child protection services to police stations in all 12 departments in Benin and provide legal assistance to victims of trafficking.

Coordination

Ensure effective coordination among agencies, including by clarifying institutional mandates and improving communication regarding the collection and sharing of data.

Ensure the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor is active and publish efforts undertaken on an annual basis.

Government Policies

Dedicate adequate resources to support the implementation of all policies related to the worst forms of child labor, including the National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons.

Social Programs

Increase the number of teachers and the number of schools. Ensure the safety and well-being of children at school, especially girls, and provide adequate sanitation facilities and menstrual accommodations. Provide accessible infrastructure and increase transportation options; alleviate financial burdens associated with schooling. Remove barriers to education by providing birth registration to all children.

Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children from low-income families, those without birth documents, children from parents who are illiterate and from single-parent households are especially at risk for child labor. Under a traditional practice called *vidomègon*, children—the majority of which are girls—from northern rural areas are trafficked to the urban southern corridor where community members and relatives use the promise of education or employment to exploit them in domestic servitude, markets, farming, in various trades in the production of handicrafts, and in commercial sexual exploitation.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Evidence suggests that incidences of abuse in school, including corporal punishment, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse by teachers in exchange for better grades continues to hamper educational access, especially for girls. Early and forced marriage, unplanned pregnancy, inadequate toilets and sanitation facilities, as well as cultural taboos and lack of access to menstruation education and products further impede girls' education. Other barriers include traveling long distances to attend class, not enough school buildings, and an insufficient number of teachers. The government runs 20 specialty schools for students with disabilities, but access is limited in rural areas. Children from rural and poor families also often lack identity documents due to the cost as well as to parents' limited understanding of birth registration procedures. Children without documentation may be denied education, leaving them more vulnerable to child labor.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Benin has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Benin's laws do not meet international standards on free public education as basic education through the lower secondary level is not guaranteed by law.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 14 Years		Articles 166 and 301 of the Labor Code; Article 210 of the Child Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Articles 210 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 1 of the Hazardous Occupations List
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Hazardous Occupations List
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 2–4, 16, and 21–25 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 201, 212, 352, and 353 of the Child Code; Articles 499–501 and 504 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 212 and 378 of the Child Code; Article 504 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 6 of Law 2005-43
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 6 of Law 2005-43; Title II, Article 32 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Articles 2 and 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors
Compulsory Education Age, 11 Years		Article 24 of Act N° 2003-17; Article 113 of the Child Code
Free Public Education		Article 13 of the Constitution; Article 114 of the Child Code; Article 24 of Act N° 2003-17

‡ Age calculated based on available information

Children in Benin are required to attend primary school, which lasts 6 years and typically ends at age 11. This standard makes children ages 11 through 14 vulnerable to child labor as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. In addition, while the law provides free primary education to all children, basic education through the lower secondary level is not guaranteed by law, which may increase the risk of children's vulnerability to child labor.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to address child labor. However, funding constraints and lack of investigators dedicated to enforcing laws against the worst forms of child labor hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (Ministère du Travail et du Fonction Publique [MTFP]): Enforces child labor laws and investigates labor code infractions. Oversees the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (*Comité Directeur National de Lutte Contre le Travail des Enfants*). In 2023, a total of 5,664 children were identified in child labor as a result of labor inspections and 900 children, including 349 girls and 467 boys, were subsequently withdrawn from child labor. In 2023, child labor inspections took place at the departmental level, but were limited at the national level due to funding constraints. Not all inspectors working at the departmental level had sufficient transportation, fuel, and other material necessities to carry out labor inspections.

Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (Ministère de l’Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique [MISP]): Enforces criminal laws related to the protection of minors, including the worst forms of child labor, through the Central Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking (OCPM). In rural areas, the police have this responsibility. The OCPM’s child protection services exist in police stations in 3 of the 12 departments in Benin (Alibori, Borgou, and Zou) and OCPM maintains a child trafficking database—Benin’s Children (*Enfants du Benin*)—to track and process child trafficking cases. Coordinates with the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service to inspect labor code infractions related to child labor, and coordinates with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance to provide assistance to survivors. Human trafficking for sexual exploitation, including child sexual exploitation, is overseen by the OCPM Vice Squad (*Brigade des Moeurs*).

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes	Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Unknown
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes	Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown

In 2023, **72** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding an **unknown** number of child labor violations. The government also conducted **136** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes, initiated **35** prosecutions, and secured an **unknown** number of convictions.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Benin established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, it is unclear whether it carried out any activities during the reporting period.

National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor: Coordinates efforts to address child labor. Falls under the jurisdiction of MTFP and includes delegates from UNICEF, trade unions, local NGOs, and other government ministries. The MTFP indicated that this committee did not carry out activities during the reporting period.

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Benin established policies related to child labor. However, resources dedicated to the implementation of the National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons were inadequate.</p>	<p>National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2019–2023): Aimed to reduce the worst forms of child labor in Benin by 70 percent by the end of 2023. The National Policy to Combat Child Labor is implemented through this action plan, and addresses legislative and institutional frameworks, develops awareness campaigns, offers education and training, provides survivor care, establishes prevention strategies, and develops institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the plan. Included a vocational education program focused on formalizing and regulating apprenticeships for children. The government continued to implement this policy throughout 2023 and planned to update the National Action Plan in 2024.</p> <p>Cooperative Agreement to Combat Cross-Border Trafficking: Outlines a tripartite cooperative agreement among the Governments of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo committing to cooperate and assist each other in the investigation of human trafficking offenses, including child trafficking. Benin has an established track record of cooperating with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and neighboring governments, including Gabon, Togo, Niger, Nigeria, and the Republic of the Congo. In 2023, this cooperation yielded positive results with the repatriation of Beninese child survivors of forced labor from these countries.</p> <p>National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons (2020–2024): Aims to eradicate trafficking in persons, including child trafficking, by strengthening governmental systems and institutional frameworks. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Technical Commission coordinates data collection on trafficking across various government ministries and agencies and is planning a Trafficking in Persons National Information System. During the reporting period, the government stated that it had provided resources for the implementation of the National Action Plan, but research indicates the amount of resources was inadequate.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>Benin funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, existing social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of Benin.</i> <i>‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p>Government-Funded Shelters and Retraining Centers:[†] Shelters and centers provide social services to survivors of child labor and child trafficking. Among these, OCPM operates an interim care facility for children rescued from child trafficking or labor exploitation, which has capacity for 160 children and provides housing, medical, legal, and psychological services. In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance operates 85 Social Promotion Centers (<i>Centre de Promotion Sociale</i> [CPS]), which provide social services to child trafficking survivors in all of Benin’s 77 municipalities. There is also a MTFP-run vocational school program that, with the assistance of UNICEF, provides training in trades to survivors of child trafficking. In 2023, OCPM’s interim care facility and the CPSs continued to provide services to child survivors, and a new advanced CPS was inaugurated in Partago, in the Djougou commune. The Central Office for the Protection of Minors also operated a temporary shelter for child trafficking survivors in Cotonou that served 160 children on short-term stays while officials worked to settle them in long-term shelters.</p> <p>National Integrated School Feeding Program (2022–2026):[†] \$31.7 million program funded by the Government of Benin and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. Implemented by the World Food Program and Catholic Relief Services. Covers 75 percent of schools in Benin and aims to improve school retention and reduce hunger. In 2023, the program provided 16,400 metric tons of food during the first quarter of the 2023–2024 academic year.</p> <p>Administrative Census for Population Identification:[†] Program to identify and register citizens lacking identity documents; collect personal data on Beninese citizens, including newborns; and issue national biometric identification cards that can be used for civil and administrative purposes. In 2023, the government continued all program activities and consolidated information to create a national digital database of citizens.</p>

For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit dol.gov/ILABprojects
 For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports