



PARAGUAY

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Paraguay made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security began the process of updating, simplifying, and digitalizing the entire inspection system, and the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor and Protect Adolescent Labor created two new departmental committees for the eradication of child labor. The Ministry of Children and Adolescents' Embrace Program also announced that it had served 1,505 children and adolescents who were in vulnerable situations or involved in child labor, providing them with financial assistance, food baskets, family support, and recreational activities.

However, children from rural and indigenous communities face difficulties accessing and completing their education, making them more vulnerable to child labor. Social programs also lack the funding and coverage needed to address child labor in rural areas. In addition, law enforcement agencies lack the funding and resources needed to sufficiently identify, investigate, and prosecute child labor crimes.

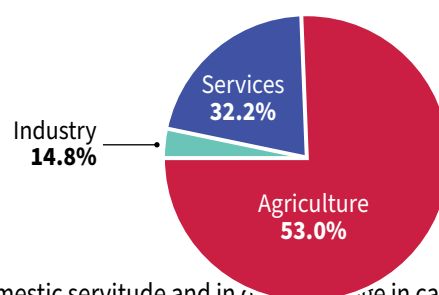


PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	5.4% (36,569)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	Unavailable

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Paraguay are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic servitude and in use as a child in cattle raising. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Working in agriculture, including in the production of peppers, manioc cassava, corn, beans, peanuts, sesame, sugarcane, tomatoes, lettuce, melons, sweet potatoes, onions, carrots, cabbages, and yerba mate (stimulant plant). Raising poultry, hogs, cattle,† sheep, and goats. Fishing, including using hooks and harpoons,† preparing bait, and cleaning fish.†



Industry

Construction, including handling heavy loads, machinery or equipment,† and production of bricks. Limestone quarrying.†



Services

Domestic work and street work† as vendors, shoe shiners, and beggars. Scavenging in landfills.†



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Debt bondage in cattle raising. Forced domestic work. Commercial sexual exploitation and use in the production of child pornography. Use in illicit activities, including drug smuggling and drug 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 Paraguay's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

Increase the compulsory education age from 17 years old to 18 years old to align with the minimum age for work.

Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the use of a child for prostitution.

Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (cont.)

Enforcement

Increase the number of labor inspectors from 14 to 249 to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 3.7 million workers.

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.

Implement the 2016 agreement to accelerate authorization of workplace inspection search warrants to improve the cooperation mechanisms between judicial authorities and labor enforcement officials.

Provide researchers in the specialized police unit with additional training so they can collect data on the worst forms of child labor.

Increase efforts to prosecute crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including by hiring and training specialized criminal investigators and prosecutors.

Provide increased resources, such as funding and fuel for law enforcement vehicles, to enable criminal investigations in remote areas.

Ensure that fines and penalties for those convicted of child labor crimes are consistently applied.

Ensure that labor inspectors are given stability of employment needed to fulfill their duties by granting permanent public servant status.

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.

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.

Government Policies

Take steps to implement the National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence and the National Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons and publish information about these efforts on an annual basis.

Social Programs

Increase access to education for children vulnerable to child labor, particularly for children living in rural and indigenous communities, by addressing the lack of identity documents, infrastructure, staff, internet connectivity, and transportation.

Ensure that financial assistance programs for child trafficking and forced labor survivors are properly funded.

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.

Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.

Create public outreach and education campaigns to provide youth and their families with more information on *criadazgo*.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children from poor rural and urban communities, including indigenous children, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. According to government reporting, exploiters abuse deep-rooted social practices and behaviors, such as historical structural poverty, lack of education, lack of job opportunities, history of rights violations, and family violence, to subjugate children and adolescents. The worst forms of child labor are prevalent along Paraguay's eastern and southern borders with Brazil and Argentina, where some children are trafficked across borders for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. Children from lower economic backgrounds are encouraged to begin working at an early age out of economic necessity. Many families view *criadazgo*, a system in which middle to upper class families informally employ and house young children as domestic workers, as a means of pursuing educational opportunities, given the poor educational opportunities in rural areas. According to civil society reports, approximately 47,000 children, mostly girls, serve as domestic workers under the *criadazgo* system, in which they are at risk of exploitation within private homes.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Children from rural and indigenous communities face difficulties accessing and completing their education due to a lack of transportation, inadequate facilities and staff, a lack of identity documents, and little to no internet connectivity. 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. The government also reports that educational exclusion is linked to high levels of poverty, a lack of development in certain areas, and increased migration. Such challenges may leave these children more vulnerable to child labor.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Paraguay has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Paraguay's laws do not meet international standards, as they lack a prohibition of child recruitment by non-state armed groups and a prohibition of the use of a child in prostitution.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 18 Years	✓	Article 1 of Law No. 2332; Article 58 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years	✓	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
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	✓	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
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor	✓	Articles 5–7 of the Comprehensive Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 125, 129, and 320 of the Penal Code; Articles 10 and 54 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	✓	Articles 4–7 of the Comprehensive Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Articles 125 and 129 of the Penal Code; Articles 10 and 54 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	✗	Article 139 of the Penal Code; Articles 4-7 of the Comprehensive Law Against Trafficking in Persons; Article 2.19 of Decree No. 4951; Article 31 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	✓	Article 1 of Law No. 1657; Article 32 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years	✓	Articles 3 and 5 of the Obligatory Military Service Law
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	✓	Articles 3 and 5 of the Obligatory Military Service Law
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	✗	
Compulsory Education Age, 17 Years	✓	Article 2 of Law No. 4088; Article 32 of the General Education Law No. 1264; Decree 6162
Free Public Education	✓	Article 76 of the Constitution; Articles 1, 2, and 32 of the General Education Law No. 1264

Children in Paraguay are required to attend school only up to age 17. This standard makes children aged 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. Laws related to commercial sexual exploitation of children do not meet international standards because the use of children in prostitution is not criminalized.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Paraguay took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human and financial resource allocation hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

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 to the Public Ministry. If MTESS finds vulnerable children or children in situations of child labor, it refers them to the Ministry of Children and Adolescents for inclusion in social programs.

Public Ministry (Attorney General): Investigates and prosecutes criminal cases related to the worst forms of child labor. The Paraguayan National Police assist with investigations and can arrest suspects at the request of the Public Ministry. The Public Ministry also maintains the Specialized Unit to Combat Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents. It comprises 2 specialized prosecutors based in Asunción, 1 specialized prosecutor based in Ciudad del Este, and 44 assistants.

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	Yes
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	Yes

In 2023, **14** labor inspectors conducted **795** worksite inspections, finding **3** child labor violations. The government also conducted **170** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes, initiated an **unknown** number of prosecutions, and convicted **2** perpetrators.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Paraguay established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, coordination efforts are hindered by a lack of sufficient financial and human resources.

National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Child Labor and Protect Adolescent Labor (CONAETI): Leads government efforts against child labor and includes representatives from MTESS, the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Children and Adolescents, and other government agencies, as well as representatives from labor unions, industry associations, and NGOs. The commission manages the National Strategy for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of Working Adolescents. During the reporting period, CONAETI created two new departmental committees for the eradication of child labor (CODETIs).

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

Key Policies Related to Child Labor	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. In 2023, this policy provided the basis for the creation of two departmental committees for the eradication of child labor (CODETIs).
<p>Paraguay established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor. However, research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement its National Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons.</p>	National Plan for Childhood and Adolescence (2022–2024): Focuses the protection of children and adolescents on four main axis points: (1) strengthening of 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 of 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. Research was unable to determine whether activities were carried out under this policy during the reporting period.
Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor	National Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons (2020–2024): Aims to guide government prevention, response, and protection actions and to establish prosecution and penalty guidelines for trafficking in persons. Also prioritizes institutional capacity building and coordination between government entities. Although the government continued to implement this plan, research was unable to determine whether activities were carried out under this policy during the reporting period.
<p>Paraguay funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs have inadequate coverage and funding to fully address child labor in all sectors, especially in cattle herding and domestic work.</p>	Immediate Response Network:† Program created to provide support to street children. Under the <i>Dispositivo de Respuesta Inmediata</i> (DRI), employees from the Ministry of Childhood and Adolescents (MINNA) 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. In 2023, DRI reported offering social services to 1,502 children and adolescents, many belonging to vulnerable populations.
<p>† 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.</p>	Embrace Program (Programa Abrazo):‡ 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. In this program, children can also join protection units through which they can engage in recreational activities and receive school reinforcement, food, and protection from child labor. The program currently operates 60 attention centers in 12 of Paraguay’s 17 departments, benefiting more than 12,000 vulnerable children from more than 3,400 families. During the reporting period, the program served 1,505 children and adolescents who were in situations of vulnerability and child labor.
	Well-Being Conditional Cash Transfer Program (Tekoporã):† Government-administered program through the Ministry of Social Development. Provides conditional cash transfers to families in rural communities. Incorporates aspects of the Embrace Program, such as the family monitoring methodology, to ensure that participant children do not engage in child labor. During the reporting period, the program implemented a 25 percent increase in the monetary assistance given to families that are part of the program. This increase is meant to compensate for the rise in inflation. The cash transfer program benefited more than 180,000 families during the reporting period.

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