

SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, São Tomé and Príncipe made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved a new national policy on social protection, which includes strategies to address extreme poverty and prevent child labor. Additionally, the government continued to fund three centers run by non-governmental organizations that assist vulnerable families, orphans, and children living and working on the street. However, minimum age protections do not meet international standards as the Labor Code does not apply to children working outside of a formal labor relationship, such as children who are self-employed. Moreover, limited financial resources hampered law enforcement efforts, and policies do not address all worst forms of child labor in the country.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	14.2% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	92.5%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	23.3%

Children in São Tomé and Príncipe are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in construction and street work.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Farming,† including weeding and fertilizing.† Fishing,† including line and hook fishing.



Industry

Construction, † carpentry, and woodworking.



Services

Working in shops, car repair, car washing, restaurants, and bars.† Street work,† including begging and street vending.†



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation.

† 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 São Tomé and Príncipe's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.

Criminalize the use of all children under the age of 18 for prostitution.

Ensure that the law criminally prohibits practices similar to slavery or criminally prohibits debt bondage and forced or compulsory labor.

Adopt legislation defining the activities and conditions permissible for light work.

Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Require that children who are under age 14 and working under Article 269 are permitted to work only in schools for general, vocational, or technical education or in other training institutions.

Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

Establish a minimum age law for voluntary military recruitment that meets international standards.

Apply minimum age for work laws to all children in formal and informal work relationships, including children who are self-employed.

Enforcement

Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data identifying risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents, and ensure that inspections are conducted in the informal sector in which child labor is known to occur.

Equip labor inspectors with adequate resources to conduct inspections, including office facilities, fuel, and transportation, all disbursed in a timely and efficient manner, and ensure that labor inspectors receive adequate technical training to strengthen their ability to perform their duties.

Publish information on criminal law enforcement efforts undertaken, including data regarding imposed penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.

Equip criminal investigators with the necessary resources, including transportation, fuel, and other necessities to carry out investigations, and ensure that they receive training to better address violations of the worst forms of child labor.

Publicize the complaint mechanism sufficiently.

Coordination

Ensure that the Anti-Child Labor Committee is active and able to carry out its intended mandate.

Government Policies

Adopt policies to address the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Social Programs

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

Increase access to education for children with disabilities, including creating programs that support children with mobility and hearing difficulties.

Implement programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.

Implement programs that specifically address child labor in agriculture.

Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, specifically for at-capacity support centers that lack the resources to fully support exploited children.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children in poverty often work to assist their families. The highest prevalence rate of child labor in São Tomé and Príncipe is in the Norte-Oeste region, where 15 percent of all children are engaged in child labor.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Reports indicate that children with disabilities, especially those with mobility or hearing difficulties, may have limited access to education. In addition, an insufficient number of teachers hinders education access in the country.



LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

São Tomé and Príncipe has not ratified key international conventions concerning child labor, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict and UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In addition, São Tomé and Príncipe lacks minimum age protections for children working outside of a formal employment relationship.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Articles 268(2) and 269 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Articles 273(2), 274, and 536 of the Labor Code; Article 171 of the Civil Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Hazardous Work List in Annex IV of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 159 and 160 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 160 and 181 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 179–182 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 279, 280, and 289 of the Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 1 of Decree-Law 3/83
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, 15 Years ‡		Articles 11 and 12 of the Basic Education System Law
Free Public Education		Article 12 of the Basic Education System Law

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The Labor Code permits children who have completed their compulsory education to perform light work that is not deemed harmful to their health or development; however, legislation specifying the activities and conditions in which light work may be undertaken has yet to be adopted. Article 269 does not require that work done by those under age 14 be done in a school or as part of a training program, which is required to meet the exemption from the minimum age standard in ILO Convention 138, Article 6. Minimum age protections contained in the Labor Code also do not apply to children working outside of a formal labor relationship, such as children who are self-employed. Although it has no law establishing a minimum age for voluntary state military recruitment, the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe indicates that a written procedure allows 17-year-olds to volunteer for military service with a parent's permission. Furthermore, laws prohibiting forced labor are not sufficient as they do not criminalize practices similar to slavery or debt bondage and forced or compulsory labor. Article 179 of the Penal Code criminalizes the use of minors between the ages of 14 and 17 in prostitution but there is no statute that criminalizes the use of a child under age 14 for prostitution.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in São Tomé and Príncipe took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient financial resources hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs: Hosts the labor inspectorate which enforces labor laws, including child labor laws. Funding for the inspectorate has not been disbursed in a timely manner, interfering with the inspectorate's ability to provide adequate resources and training.

Ministry of Justice, Public Administration and Human Rights (MOJ): Enforces and prosecutes criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor through the Judiciary Police, Public Prosecutor's office, and the courts.

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	N/A
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes	Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	No
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	N/A

In 2023, 4 labor inspectors conducted 63 worksite inspections, finding no child labor violations. No investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, nor were there any convictions or penalties imposed for the worst forms of child labor.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>São Tomé and Príncipe established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, there is a lack of efficacy in accomplishing mandates.</p>	<p>Anti-Child Labor Committee: Leads efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. No activities were undertaken by the committee during the reporting period due to a lack of resources.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>São Tomé and Príncipe established a policy related to child labor. However, this policy does not cover all worst forms of child labor in the country, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.</p>	<p>National Policy and Strategy for Social Protection (2014–2023): Established social protection strategies aimed at eliminating extreme poverty over a 10-year time frame, reinforcing the rights of children, and addressing child labor. This policy guided the Directorate of Social Protection and Solidarity as it provided counseling and integration services to children identified through labor inspections and criminal investigations. During the reporting period, partnered with UNICEF and World Bank to provide training to families on managerial and business skills. A new National Policy and Strategy for Social Protection (2024–2028) was approved in November 2023.</p>

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>São Tomé and Príncipe funded programs that may contribute to preventing child labor. However, these social programs do not cover all worst forms of child labor, such as the commercial sexual exploitation of children.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe.</i></p>	<p>Support Centers†: Three government-supported centers run by NGOs, operating in areas with high concentrations of poor families, orphans, and street children. Two of the centers receive direct financial support from the government while the third receives in-kind support as food donations. Teach income-generating skills. Support centers were active and operating at capacity during the reporting period.</p> <p>Programa Familia: Funded by the World Bank and disbursed by the Santomean government, this program requires that children are in school to qualify. Provides financial stipends every other month of \$57 to 2,830 families.</p>
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For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit dol.gov/ILABprojects
 For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports