

# Cameroon

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Cameroon made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government began drafting a national report on child labor and conducted a study on child labor in the cocoa sector. In the Far North, Northwest, and Southwest regions, children associated with non-state armed groups were enrolled into Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration Centers that provided care and social reintegration. Finally, the labor inspectorate acquired resources, including vehicles, to assist inspectors conducting their mandated duties. Despite these efforts, Cameroon's legal provisions against child labor are insufficient because trafficking prohibitions require that children be threatened, forced, or coerced to establish the criminal act, contrary to international law. The law also does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, or the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. Cameroon also does not criminalize the use of a child for prostitution or the use, offering, and procurement of a child for pornographic performances. In addition, although over 7,000 worksite inspections were conducted, no civil violations of child labor laws were reported; and no investigations, prosecutions, or convictions restrained perpetrators committing the worst forms of child labor.

## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	43.7% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	80.0%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	42.4%

Children in Cameroon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, use in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs, and in recruitment by non-state armed groups for use in conflict. Children also perform dangerous tasks in cocoa production and in gold mining.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Working in agriculture, including cocoa production† and the cultivation of illegal plants, such as cannabis, and guarding the fields. Use of sharp tools, exposure to fire, handling hazardous pesticides, and working at heights. Driving or maintaining agricultural machinery. Raising livestock. Fishing, such as harvesting, scaling, gutting, cutting, cleaning, packaging, smoking, transporting, and waste removal.
Industry	Artisanal gold mining,† including handling mercury, cyanide, sulfuric acid, and sodium hydroxide; and digging or standing in stagnant water to extract minerals and stones. Handling heavy loads, working underground, chemical exposure, inhaling dust and harmful chemicals. Construction work, including at heights.
Services	Domestic work and street work, including vending and begging. Repairing automobiles. Commerce, including working in restaurants, and as phone booth operators. Transportation, including as assistants to bus drivers.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation. Use in illicit activities, including the cultivation, production, distribution, and trafficking of drugs. Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including fighting, gathering intelligence, providing operational support as porters and cooks, and sexual slavery. Forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, work in spare parts shops, artisanal gold mining, quarries, street vending, construction, and forced begging.

† 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 Cameroon's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Area	Suggested Actions
<b>Legal Framework</b>	Ratify all key international conventions concerning child labor, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.
	Establish by law 9 years of free basic public education, in harmony with international commitments.
	Ensure that laws establish a compulsory education age of at least 14.
	Ensure that laws establishing free public education include the provision that no school official shall levy fees.
	Criminalize the use of children under the age of 18 for prostitution. Criminalize the use, offering, and procuring of children under the age of 18 for pornography and pornographic performances.
	Criminally prohibit the use of children for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.
	Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.
	Remove the requirement of threats, the use of force, and coercion from child trafficking provisions, and ensure that child trafficking prohibitions apply to all children aged 18 and under.
	Prohibit work at dangerous heights and underwater for children.
<b>Enforcement</b>	Ensure that children associated with armed groups are referred to social services providers, ceasing the practice of detaining them as adults.
	Provide the labor inspectorate with sufficient funding and resources—including providing vehicles—and increase the number of labor inspectors from 224 to 640 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 9.6 million people.
	Ensure that labor violations are reported and penalized. Conduct routine and targeted inspections in all sectors, including mining and the informal sector, and institute routine inspections during periods of increased labor demand, such as harvests.
	Ensure that criminal enforcement agencies conduct investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiate prosecutions, and convict perpetrators.
	Collect and publish comprehensive statistics on criminal law enforcement efforts.
	Train enforcement officials on how to identify child trafficking, ensure that survivors receive rehabilitation services, and raise awareness of referral mechanisms for child labor complaints.
<b>Coordination</b>	Address the insecurity caused by non-state armed groups.
	Ensure that the National Committee to Combat Child Labor monitors cases of the worst forms of child labor, improves coordination among agencies collecting and reporting data on these efforts, and publishes its activities.
<b>Government Policies</b>	Establish a replacement National Action Plan to address the worst forms of child labor to replace the expiring National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, and ensure that activities implemented during the reporting period are published.
	Publish activities undertaken by the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor during the reporting period.
	Implement the National Development Strategy and publish activity information undertaken during the reporting period.

Area	Suggested Actions
Social Programs	Secure the autonomy and inviolate safe space of school properties, removing all armed groups from educational facilities and protecting the peaceful gathering of students and teachers for schooling. Provide a sufficient number of schools and teachers, allowing for basic classroom furniture, toilets, and sanitation. Provide for the costs of books, uniforms, tuition, and additional school fees so all children are able to access education.
	Continue to increase birth registration and expand access to identity documents so children can access secondary school and exams.
	Implement and publish activities undertaken by the Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children program, the Cameroon Child Institute at Betamba, and the Zero Children in Gold Mines program.
	Increase funding and programs to address the full scope of the child labor problem, including in street begging, gold mining, agriculture, and commercial sexual exploitation.

### CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Native populations and internally displaced persons are disproportionately affected by child labor. Armed conflict and several regional crises in Cameroon and neighboring countries have displaced over 2.1 million people. Additionally, in 2024, the Far North region was severely affected by floods that damaged or destroyed 56,084 houses, and 65 health centers, impacting over 448,000 people, including 152,376 children, leaving affected children more vulnerable to child labor as they lack homes or access to basic services. Children in the Far North region are also at higher risk of abduction and forced recruitment because of non-state armed groups in the region. Furthermore, due to its geographical location, Cameroon plays a central role in criminal drug trafficking networks that target children for the production, distribution, and trafficking of drugs, which makes already vulnerable children more prone to being subjected to the worst forms of child labor.

### BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Violence in schools, especially in the Northwest and Southwest regions, continues to disrupt education. Many schools have been closed due to attacks by armed groups, and students and teachers have been subjected to violence, kidnappings, and threats. Non-state armed groups impose a lockdown on large parts of the Northwest and Southwest regions on Mondays, which limits the school week to 4 days. The severe floods damaged or destroyed 262 schools, impacting the ability of over 150,000 children to continue their education. The lack of infrastructure including schools, classrooms, and desks, and the lack of sanitation facilities create important barriers to education, particularly for girls. An insufficient number of teachers, particularly in the Far North and conflict-affected regions, further hampers education. Additional school fees also pose a significant barrier for many families, including the cost of uniforms, instructional materials, and textbooks; and further Parent-Teacher Association fees are required to build classrooms and purchase chairs, benches, and tables. Lack of birth registration also impedes access to education, which increases children's vulnerability to labor exploitation.

### LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Cameroon has not ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In addition, Cameroon's laws do not meet international standards on free, compulsory, basic public education, the identification of hazardous occupations, commercial sexual exploitation, the use of children in illicit activities, and the prohibition of child trafficking.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets	Legislation
		International Standards	
Minimum Age for Work	14	✓	Article 2 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Sections 2–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Sections 11, 292, 293, 342, and 342-1 of the Penal Code; Section 2 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		X	Sections 2 and 4–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Sections 11 and 342-1 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		X	Section 294 of the Penal Code; Articles 76, 81, and 82 of the Law on Cybersecurity and Cyber-criminality
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		X	
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓*	Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		X	
Compulsory Education Age	12‡	X	Preamble of the Constitution; Articles 9 and 16 of the Law Orienting the Education System
Free Public Education		X	Article 9 of the Law Orienting the Education System; Articles 46–48 of the Decree on the Organization of Public Schools

\* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The Decree on the Organization of Public Schools only provides 6 years of free schooling, but the international standard requires a free and compulsory education for a total of 9 years. The same Decree also permits school officials to levy fees against children in secondary education and post-primary education. The failure to provide for complete free basic education may increase the risk of children's involvement in the worst forms of child labor. Cameroon does not meet the international standard for protection from commercial sexual exploitation because it does not criminalize the use of a child for prostitution or the use, offering, and procurement of a child for pornographic performances. Cameroon's human trafficking provisions do not protect children aged 16 to 18 and require threats, the use of force, or coercion to establish the crime, contrary to international standards. Further, hazardous work at dangerous heights and underwater is not prohibited for children. The government has not addressed gaps in Cameroon's legal framework regarding the prohibition of the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs and the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.

## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal enforcement agencies in Cameroon took action to address child labor. However, insufficient resources and logistical challenges in reaching remote areas remained significant barriers to eradicating child labor.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement	
<b>Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MINTSS):</b> Enforces labor laws, including those related to child labor, and promotes decent working conditions. In 2024, labor inspectorate buildings were renovated, and office furniture and supplies were provided. MINTSS also acquired 4x4 work vehicles for regional delegates and provided additional vehicles to certain departmental delegates and brigade chiefs. Other efforts in 2024 focused on raising awareness, conducting information campaigns, and identifying vulnerable groups.	
<b>Criminal Law Enforcement Agencies:</b> The Ministry of Justice prosecutes cases referred by the General Delegate for National Security or the Ministry of Defense's National Gendarmerie. The National Gendarmerie investigates cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation and operates a hotline to report human trafficking crimes. The General Delegate for National Security is the national police service of Cameroon, enforcing laws against the worst forms of child labor and investigating violations in urban areas. Through its Special Vice Squad, it investigates cases of human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse against women and children. The National Interpol Bureau coordinates with criminal law enforcement and social services agencies to identify children subjected to forced labor. Although there is a National Referral System to assist human trafficking survivors, research was unable to determine whether stakeholders used the system during the reporting period. The agencies continued to operate during the reporting period.	

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts	
Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes
Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	N/A
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	No
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	N/A

In 2024, **224** labor inspectors conducted **7,284** worksite inspections, finding **0** child labor violations. However, the government conducted **0** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, and **no** prosecutions were initiated or perpetrators convicted.

## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Cameroon established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, there was a lack of sufficient resources to carry out mandates.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
<b>National Committee to Combat Child Labor (CNLCTE):</b> Coordinates government efforts to address child labor. Led by MINTSS and includes representatives from other ministries and government bodies as well as representatives from civil society. In 2024, CNLCTE began work on a new national report on child labor, beginning with a study on child labor in the cocoa sector, and also worked on a draft law setting forth a list of hazardous work for children.

Cameroon established policies related to child labor. However, no efforts were reported in advancing or renewing the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor, which is set to expire in 2025.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
<b>National Development Strategy (2020–2030):</b> Includes goals such as poverty reduction, access to basic services, improved legal frameworks on the worst forms of child labor, and 10 years of free basic education. Research did not find information on activities undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.
<b>National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Plan d'Action National pour l'Elimination des Pires Formes de Travail des Enfants au Cameroun) (2018–2025):</b> A national policy and strategic instrument specifically dedicated to the elimination of child labor adopted by the National Working Group on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor. No efforts were reported in advancing or renewing the plan in 2024.

Cameroon funded and participated in programs that include the goal of preventing or eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors, including street begging, gold mining, agriculture, and commercial sexual exploitation.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
<b>Shelters and Programs:‡</b> In conjunction with the National Employment Fund, the Ministry of Social Affairs-funded Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children (Project 559) provides food, clothing, temporary shelter, medical services, psychosocial counseling, basic education, and vocational training. The Cameroon Childhood Institute at Betamba has an intake capacity of 240 overnight lodgers and can accommodate up to 500 daytime visitors, including child survivors of forced labor. The Ministry of Social Affairs provided similar care to trafficking survivors through seven shelter and rehabilitation centers across the country, which also offer special protection measures, as well as family, school, or socioeconomic reintegration. These programs and shelters continued during the reporting period. Research did not find information on activities undertaken to implement these programs during the reporting period.
<b>Support Project in Quality Management for Cocoa and Coffee Production/Forever Chocolate (2019–2025):‡</b> Promotes labor standards in the cocoa industry, including the elimination of child labor in the Center, Littoral, South, and West regions of Cameroon. Implemented by the NGO association Child Youth Future ( <i>Enfant Jeunesse Avenir</i> ), in partnership with Cameroon's largest cocoa processor, Cameroon Cacao Industrial Corporation (SIC Cacaos). Other key stakeholders include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family, the Ministry of Basic Education, MINTSS, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Forever Chocolate guides farmers in the cocoa basin toward production methods free of child labor and includes supply chain tracing, monitoring, and remediation systems to ensure the eradication of child labor. The project also cares for vulnerable children by providing for school fees, school kits, and health services. Systemic curbs on the demand for child labor were instigated by empowering women and providing families with alternative sources of income. Research did not find information on activities undertaken to implement this program during the reporting period.
<b>Zero Children in Gold Mines:‡</b> Implemented by the state-owned National Mining Corporation ( <i>Société Nationale des Mines</i> ) to eliminate child labor in gold mining in the East region, which has more than 300 gold mining sites. The program reintegrates children into the educational system by supporting school registration, monitoring class attendance, distributing educational materials, and promoting the benefits of education and the dangers of mines to parents and traditional rulers. The program continued for a fourth consecutive year during the reporting period.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Cameroon.  
† The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

For references, please visit [dol.gov/ChildLaborReports](https://dol.gov/ChildLaborReports)