

# Central African Republic

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, the Central African Republic made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved a roadmap to accelerate efforts to eradicate child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking in May and participated in an intergovernmental workshop on these issues in December. The government also signed a Handover Protocol on the Protection and Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups to Civilian Authorities to ensure that child soldiers are treated as victims, which applies to government forces as well as non-state armed groups. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, the Central African Republic is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because government security forces and government-aligned forces continued to use children in support roles and to coordinate with armed groups that recruited and used children in armed conflict. In addition, the government did not conduct labor inspections, which are key to preventing child labor and holding exploitative employers accountable. Authorities did not report any civil or criminal penalties for child labor offenses in 2024, and insufficient human, financial, and material resources hindered their enforcement efforts.

## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

| Statistics on Children’s Work and Education |          |                        |
|---|----------|------------------------|
| Children                                    | Age      | Percent and Population |
| Working                                     | 5 to 14  | 30.8% (Unavailable)    |
| Hazardous Work by Children                  | 15 to 17 | Unavailable            |
| Attending School                            | 5 to 14  | 68.1%                  |
| Combining Work and School                   | 7 to 14  | 39.7%                  |

Children in the Central African Republic are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use in armed conflict and commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining and agriculture.

| Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity |   |
|--|---|
| Agriculture  | Working in agriculture, including animal husbandry, sowing, weeding, harvesting, and handling fertilizers and pesticides.† Working in logging. Working in fishing.  |
| Industry   | Diamond and gold mining,† including digging, washing ore, carrying heavy loads, and processing, sometimes resulting in exposure to mercury.† Quarrying.† Working in forges† and sawmills,† including sharpening sawblades. Working in construction.   |
| Services   | Domestic work and street work, including vending, portage, and loading and unloading vehicles.  |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡            | Recruitment by state security forces for use in armed conflict, including as domestic workers, checkpoint assistants, and errand runners. Recruitment by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including as combatants, cooks, porters, informants, and domestic workers, and for sexual exploitation. Forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, vending, and mining. 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.

In 2024, the Government of the Central African Republic failed to cease its use of children in armed conflict. In 2019, the government and 14 armed groups signed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, which included a call for all parties to immediately cease recruitment of child soldiers. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, the United Nations verified and documented the recruitment and use of 331 children by 8 non-state armed groups, as well as the Central African Armed Forces, state-supported Wagner Group forces, and Wagner-trained Wagner ti Azande and Azande Ani Kpi Gbe elements. While non-state armed groups committed the majority of violations, government and government-affiliated forces were found to have used 33 children in hostilities during the reporting period.

## SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

| Area                       | Suggested Action  |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Legal Framework</b>     | Establish, by law, free basic education through lower secondary school, and increase the age to which education is compulsory from 11 to 18 to align with the minimum age for work.   |
|                            | Specify the conditions of work for children in light work, including that children may not work during school hours.  |
| <b>Enforcement</b>         | Publish labor law enforcement data, including the number and type of inspections conducted, the number of child labor violations found, and the number of violations for which penalties were imposed and collected.  |
|                            | Implement a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor inspections.   |
|                            | Provide the labor inspectorate with financial and material resources, including its own transportation, to enforce child labor laws, and increase the number of inspectors from 25 to 48 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 1.9 million people.  |
|                            | Conduct worksite inspections, including routine and unannounced inspections, in both the formal and informal sectors, to identify child labor violations.   |
|                            | Ensure that formal penalties or sanctions are imposed for child labor law violations, rather than pursuing conciliation, as appropriate.  |
|                            | Ensure that regional labor inspection offices are under the supervision and control of a central authority, and that regional directorates submit periodic reports on inspection activities.  |
|                            | Train Ministry of Mines inspectors on child labor laws and referral mechanisms to ensure that they enforce national prohibitions against child labor in mining and connect children found performing hazardous work with appropriate services.  |
|                            | Expand resources for and training on referral mechanisms for children found in child labor situations.  |
|                            | Collect and publish complete criminal law enforcement data, including the number of investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and penalties imposed in worst forms of child labor cases.   |
|                            | Investigate, prosecute, and impose penalties on perpetrators of worst forms of child labor crimes, including forced labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.  |
|                            | Impose penalties on officials who are responsible for or complicit in child labor crimes, including the use of children in support roles in the armed forces, in accordance with the law.   |
|                            | Cease coordination with and support to non-state armed groups, including the Wagner Group, that recruit or use children in combat or support roles.   |
| <b>Coordination</b>        | Establish a coordinating mechanism that addresses all worst forms of child labor, including in mining, agriculture, and domestic work.  |
| <b>Government Policies</b> | Adopt a policy that addresses child labor in all relevant sectors, including in agriculture and domestic work.  |
|                            | Expand efforts to facilitate the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation and the 2024 Handover Protocol to remove children from armed groups and provide them with rehabilitation and reintegration services.   |
| <b>Social Programs</b>     | Improve access to education for all children by eliminating school-related fees; making additional efforts to provide all children with birth registration; ensuring that religious minorities are not denied access to education; improving basic educational infrastructure throughout the country, including buildings and adequate furniture, sanitary facilities, teachers, and supplies; and ensuring that schools are safe and free from armed groups. |
|                            | Expand programs to assist former child soldiers and children associated with armed groups, support their reintegration into society, and improve coordination among relevant actors.  |
|                            | Allocate sufficient resources and implement programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and child labor in mining, throughout the country.   |

## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Conflict-affected children in the Central African Republic face increased risks of child labor, especially its worst forms, due to the instability and limited economic activities created by ongoing violence and the threat inherent in the presence of armed groups. These children may be susceptible to direct recruitment and use in armed conflict, or may be exploited in forced labor in mining, domestic work, or sexual slavery by armed groups that control the area where they live. Girls in the Central African Republic also face higher risks of commercial sexual exploitation independent of conflict situations, including in urban centers like Bangui, where girls as young as age 12 are subjected to exploitation in prostitution. Furthermore, children in the Ba'Aka, Bofi, and Aka communities are often sent to perform unpaid labor for other families or tribes to pay off debts.

## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Children face numerous barriers to accessing education in the Central African Republic, including chronic shortages of basic infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, school-related fees, labor exploitation by teachers themselves, security concerns, and destruction and occupation of some school buildings by armed groups, government security forces, and Wagner Group elements. While the government has achieved a measure of stability in the capital region, violence and insecurity in the rest of the country exacerbate barriers to education, especially for girls, who fear sexual assault when traveling long distances between home and school. The lack of access to sanitation and sanitary products also pose obstacles to girls attending school. Finally, despite recent efforts to implement free birth registration, the government still lacks sufficient capacity to reach all children, especially in rural areas, leaving many children without the identity documents required to enroll in school. There has also been reporting that children in Muslim families, or with names perceived to be Muslim, face discrimination in obtaining identity documentation.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The Central African Republic has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, the Central African Republic's laws do not meet international standards on education because they do not guarantee free public education through lower secondary school and the compulsory education age is lower than the minimum age for work.

| Laws and Regulations on Child Labor   |     |                               |   |
|---|-----|-------------------------------|---|
| Standard  | Age | Meets International Standards | Legislation   |
| Minimum Age for Work  | 18  | ✓                             | Articles 389, 390, and 392 of the Labor Code; Articles 61 and 64 of the Child Protection Code   |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work  | 18  | ✓                             | Article 263 of the Labor Code; Articles 63–66 of the Child Protection Code; Order on Hazardous Child Labor                              |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children |     | ✓                             | Article 261 of the Labor Code; Articles 4 and 247 of the Mining Code; Order on Hazardous Child Labor                                    |
| Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor                        |     | ✓                             | Articles 7 and 393 of the Labor Code; Articles 63 and 173 of the Child Protection Code; Article 151 of the Penal Code                   |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking  |     | ✓                             | Article 151 of the Penal Code; Articles 3, 5–10, 15, and 44 of the Law on Combatting Trafficking in Persons                             |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children                     |     | ✓                             | Articles 262, 263, and 393 of the Labor Code; Articles 90–92 and 111 of the Penal Code; Articles 63 and 67 of the Child Protection Code |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities                           |     | ✓                             | Articles 262, 263, and 393 of the Labor Code; Articles 63 and 173 of the Child Protection Code  |
| Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment                          | 18  | ✓                             | Articles 2 and 75 of the Child Protection Code; Decree N° 85.432; Declaration to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict         |

| Laws and Regulations on Child Labor                                   |     |                               |   |
|---|-----|-------------------------------|---|
| Standard  | Age | Meets International Standards | Legislation   |
| Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military |     | √*                            | Articles 262 and 393 of the Labor Code; Articles 2 and 75 of the Child Protection Code; Declaration to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict |
| Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups         |     | √                             | Articles 262 and 393 of the Labor Code; Articles 2, 75, and 179 of the Child Protection Code  |
| Compulsory Education Age  | 11  | ×                             | Article 9 of the Constitution; Article 49 of the Child Protection Code  |
| Free Public Education   |     | ×                             | Article 43 of the Constitution; Articles 49 and 54 of the Child Protection Code; Education Sector Plan (2020–2029)                                    |

\* Country has no conscription

The Constitution of the Central African Republic provides for free and compulsory public education only at the primary level, which covers the first 6 years of formal education. This does not meet the international standard of free public education through lower secondary school and leaves children vulnerable to exploitative labor. In addition, compulsory education could end as early as age 11, while the minimum age for work is 18. This leaves children who have finished primary school vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work without restrictions until age 18. In addition, the light work framework does not meet international standards because it does not specify the conditions of work.

## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in the Central African Republic took limited actions to address child labor. However, a lack of human, financial, and material resources hindered their enforcement efforts.

| Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement  |
|---|
| <b>Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Protection (MOL):</b> Monitors and enforces laws related to child labor through its General Directorate of Labor and Social Welfare and seven regional labor directorates. Reporting suggests that MOL lacked the financial, human, and material resources needed to fulfill its mandate during the reporting period.  |
| <b>Ministry of Justice:</b> Oversees the Juvenile Court, which maintains sole jurisdiction over criminal cases involving juvenile plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses, and victims of crime, including former child soldiers. Also oversees a special police unit responsible for monitoring children's safety and welfare in large cities, as well as at industrial and mining areas, and for recording criminal offenses against children. Judges are responsible for working with the police, the Child Protection Unit, the Children's Prosecutor, and social workers to refer child victims to services. In partnership with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice oversees the Mixed Unit for Rapid Intervention and Repression of Sexual Violence to Women and Children, an interagency enforcement body responsible for operating a 24-hour hotline, supporting investigations into child trafficking allegations, and connecting victims with medical and social services. During the reporting period, members of the Internal Security Forces participated in a capacity-building training with MINUSCA and the UN Development Program focused on organized crime, including trafficking in persons. |

| Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts                                      |         |
|---|---------|
| Has a Labor Inspectorate  | Yes     |
| Able to Assess Civil Penalties  | Yes     |
| Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections                                | No      |
| 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 | Unknown |
| Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes                 | Unknown |

In 2024, 25 labor inspectors conducted 0 worksite inspections. It is **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted. Research indicates that the government did not allocate funds for labor inspections during the reporting period, effectively removing the inspectorate's ability to enforce the country's labor laws. Labor inspections are a key tool for identifying child labor violations, and their absence puts children at risk of exploitation.

## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

The Central African Republic established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, there is a lack of a coordinating mechanism to address all worst forms of child labor in the country, including in mining, agriculture, and domestic work.

### Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

**National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons:** Interministerial working group with representatives from key ministries, including MOL. Coordinates implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Children and provides day-to-day coordination of state agencies. During the reporting period, the committee met monthly. While the committee makes an effort to address child labor broadly in its anti-trafficking work, it lacks the capacity and mandate to effectively address all relevant forms of child labor in the country.

The Central African Republic established policies related to child labor. However, these policies do not cover child labor in all sectors, including in agriculture and domestic work.

### Key Policies Related to Child Labor

**Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic:** Peace agreement signed by 14 armed groups and the government in February 2019. Includes provisions to end the recruitment and use of children by armed groups and to facilitate the separation of children from their ranks. Led to the adoption of the National Strategy for Community-Based Reintegration of Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups and the creation of Community Child Protection Networks and a Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Rehabilitation coordinating body.

#### **Handover Protocol on the Protection and Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups to Civilian**

**Authorities:**\* Developed through extensive collaboration and signed between the UN and the Government of the Central African Republic on September 30. Ensures that child soldiers are treated as victims, and applies to government forces, as well as non-state armed groups. Details standard operating procedures for all stakeholders to follow to ensure that, within a 24-hour period, any child associated with armed elements is identified, is reported to UN social services providers, receives protection services, and is transferred to civilian authorities. During the reporting period, training on the standard operating procedures was provided to Central African Republic Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces, as well as to officials from the judiciary and the Ministry of Women, Family, and Child Protection.

**UN Strategic Roadmap:** Action plan developed to accelerate efforts to eradicate forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking by 2030 and child labor by 2025. Includes the objectives of adopting regulations that address the worst forms of child labor, adopting a national social protection policy, strengthening anti-trafficking coordination bodies, mapping stakeholders, expanding awareness campaigns to educate communities about the worst forms of child labor and human trafficking, conducting a nationwide human trafficking study, creating warning committees on mine sites and high-risk areas, building shelters for victims in the provinces, expanding protection capacity, and improving data management and tracking for human trafficking cases. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Humanitarian Action partnered with the International Organization for Migration to organize community awareness sessions on trafficking in persons and conduct a weekly broadcast on the topic from April to July on the national radio.

\* Policy was approved during the reporting period.

† The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.

The Central African Republic funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors in which child labor has been identified throughout the country, including in commercial sexual exploitation and child labor in mining.

| Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor  |
|---|
| <b>UNICEF Programs:</b> In partnership with the government and NGOs, coordinate the removal of children from forced labor situations and provide necessary social services for their rehabilitation, enrollment in schools or vocational training programs, and placement in stable homes. Support the government in providing basic education and vocational skills training to children who are most at risk for child labor exploitation and armed group recruitment. Also support shelters that provide immediate care, food, and psychosocial support to vulnerable children and former child soldiers. During the reporting period, programs worked with the government to provide community reintegration support to 786 children formerly associated with armed groups (206 girls and 496 boys), constructed new classrooms, trained 1,998 teachers across multiple regions, and provided school materials to over 99,000 displaced children for the 2024–2025 school year. |
| <b>Youth Development Programs:</b> <sup>‡</sup> Ministry of National Education and MOL initiatives to provide children with positive livelihood alternatives to joining armed groups or criminal gangs. In 2024, with support from MINUSCA, rehabilitated and equipped the Bria Vocational Training Center, which aims to provide literacy classes and practical training in trades such as carpentry and mechanics to youth ages 14 and up.  |

<sup>‡</sup> Program is funded by the Government of the Central African Republic.  
<sup>†</sup> 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)