

Costa Rica

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Costa Rica made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government issued the National Policy on Childhood and Adolescence 2024–2036 on April 18, 2024, which includes guidelines for compliance with regulations to guarantee the rights of children and strengthens interventions for the prevention, detection, and comprehensive response to situations of labor exploitation of minors. Additionally, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security made efforts to expand the detection of child labor by training 1,392 officials from 17 entities, such as health inspectors, agriculture inspectors, teachers, and child welfare workers, on child labor indicators and how to report potential cases. The government also supported multiple conditional cash transfer programs to support students, including reaching 281,998 students through the "Let's Get Ahead" program. However, despite robust social programs, coordinating implementation across agencies was a challenge. Additionally, the number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Costa Rica's workforce.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	Unavailable
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	98.4%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	7.0%

Children in Costa Rica are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Harvesting coffee and cattle raising.
Industry	Construction and manufacturing.
Services	Working in restaurants and hotels. Street vending.† Domestic work.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in agriculture and domestic work. Use in illicit activities, including in the transportation or selling of drugs, 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 Costa Rica's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.
	Raise the minimum age for work from age 15 to age 17 to align with the compulsory education age.
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspections occur in all workplaces, including in rural areas and the agriculture and informal sectors.
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate has adequate funding and increase the number of labor inspectors from 118 to 157 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 2.4 million people.

Area	Suggested Action
	Ensure that the judiciary, prosecutors, municipal authorities, and the police have sufficient staff, training, and resources to identify, investigate, prosecute, and convict perpetrators of human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children in a timely manner, and to identify victims of child trafficking and refer them to appropriate social services.
	Address instances of disorder, abuse, and neglect in the National Child Welfare Agency shelter network, which provides services to victims of the worst forms of child labor, by addressing issues of management, staff training, facility conditions, and any other areas identified as problematic.
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children, including by increasing awareness of school enrollment requirements, improving school water and electrical infrastructure, and increasing access for students with disabilities.
	Enhance social programs to address all forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation and illicit activities.
	Ensure that programs such as Let's Get Ahead and Houses of Joy are sufficiently funded and potential participants are identified across all locations.
	Update the 2019 Child Labor Risk Indicators Module that classified cantons according to levels of vulnerability to inform policies and programs.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children living in coastal regions face the greatest risk for child labor in agriculture, with the highest incidences of child labor occurring in the provinces of Limón, Puntarenas, and Guanacaste. Children living in tourist destinations, border areas, and in the Northern and Pacific coastal zones are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, girls from Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and other Latin American countries have been identified as victims of sex trafficking and domestic work in Costa Rica. Nicaraguan children in the country are also subjected to forced labor in agriculture. Children transiting Costa Rica may also be at risk of forced begging.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

While preschool and general basic education are free and compulsory, some children in rural areas, girls, children with disabilities, and children from native communities faced barriers to education access, including discrimination. Children in rural locations experienced unique barriers, such as school buildings with inadequate infrastructure, including poor water and sanitation facilities. Nineteen percent of educational centers did not have access to water, and ten percent lacked electricity. In an effort to reduce barriers, Costa Rica has implemented innovative inclusion models for students and eliminated documentation requirements for enrollment, such as transcripts showing previous schooling or parent's identity documents. However, in recent years, national surveys have identified an increase in the number of adolescents aged 15 to 17 years old outside the educational system. Moreover, in 2024, 5,579 secondary school students, representing approximately 0.6 percent of all students, failed to return after the mid-year vacation.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Costa Rica has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, as Costa Rica's minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	15	✓	Articles 3, 78, 92, and 101 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 1 and 5 of Law 8922; Article 87 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		✓	Article 94 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 5 of Law 8922; Article 88 of the Labor Code; Articles 5 and 6 of Regulation No. 36640
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 1 and 2 of Law No. 9545; Article 20 of the Constitution; Articles 7, 172, 189 bis, 381, 383, and 384 of the Penal Code; Articles 5 and 7 of the Trafficking in Persons Law
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Law No. 9545; Articles 7, 172, 189 bis, 192, 381, and 383 of the Penal Code; Articles 5, 7, and 74 of the Trafficking in Persons Law
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✓	Articles 160, 167, 168, and 170–174 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Articles 7, 188, 381, and 390 of the Penal Code; Article 77 of the Narcotics Law
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment		N/A†	
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		N/A†	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✗	
Compulsory Education Age	17‡	✓	Articles 57 and 59 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 78 of the Constitution
Free Public Education		✓	Article 59 of the Childhood and Adolescence Code; Article 8 of the Education Law; Article 78 of the Constitution

† Country has no standing military

‡ Age calculated based on available information

As Costa Rica's minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Costa Rica took actions to address child labor. However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS) and criminal enforcement agencies, including insufficient resource allocation and training for criminal investigators on identification and detection, that hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
<p>MTSS: Monitors and enforces provisions in the Labor Code related to child labor, including conducting school visits and worksite inspections. Through the Office for the Attention and Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of Adolescent Labor (OATIA), responds to and attempts to prevent child labor through policy development and public awareness campaigns. Also provides referrals to government services for those found to be in exploitative labor. Between 2023 and 2024, scheduled training for 100 percent of the inspectors, including training to ensure that inspectors develop a comprehensive understanding of hazardous work for minors and the evaluation process during inspection visits. However, insufficient financial and human resources limited its efforts to enforce child labor laws.</p>

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Attorney General's Office: Enforces criminal laws protecting children, including laws prohibiting the worst forms of child labor. Coordinates efforts with the Judicial Investigative Police; the Immigration Police; the National Police; municipal police forces; the National Child Welfare Agency; the Social Security System; the Ministries of Education and Health; and the Civil Registry; as well as with NGOs, international organizations, diplomatic missions, and foreign law enforcement. In 2024, the Trafficking Prosecution Unit immediately coordinated with the National Child Welfare Agency for all new cases received. However, some officials lack an understanding of human trafficking indicators, which prevented timely identification of victims, prosecution of perpetrators, and direct care for victims.

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	Yes
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes

In 2024, **118** labor inspectors conducted **10,075**† worksite inspections, finding **15** child labor violations. There were also **20** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes, with **10** prosecutions initiated and **2** perpetrators convicted.

† Data are up until October 2024.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Costa Rica established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

National Committee for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and Protection of Adolescent Workers: Committee comprises 11 public institutions, as well as representatives from the business sector, labor unions, and civil society, and develops policy and program initiatives for eliminating child labor and regulating adolescent work. Responsible for implementing the Roadmap to Make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labor and Its Worst Forms. In 2024, during a session of the committee, MTSS presented the 2023 compliance report addressing commitments undertaken in the Roadmap. The public sector, employer organizations, worker organizations, NGOs, and trade unions have developed actions to fulfill the commitments agreed to in the Roadmap. Additionally, during a committee session, the first product of the ILO consultation "Statistical Measurement of Child Labor in Costa Rica: Technical Proposal for the Measurement, Identification, and Attention of Cases, Using Administrative Records" was presented.

Costa Rica established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Roadmap to Make Costa Rica a Country Free of Child Labor and Its Worst Forms (2021–2025): Aims to eradicate all forms of child labor in Costa Rica by 2025 by strengthening efforts to identify and track hazardous child labor, and by increasing social awareness and collaborative efforts to address child labor. During 2024, MTSS created a commission led by OATIA to update the procedures contained in the 2008 inter-institutional directive for minor workers, and its implementation will be binding for all the institutions that participated in its development. MTSS, with support from ILO, also reviewed the 2025 commitments, which resulted in a proposal to update and improve the roadmap in 2025. The proposal also includes a recommendation for the design of a new action plan for 2026–2030. The participating entities adopted the proposal to reorganize the roadmap to achieve greater efficiency in the programming, implementation, and monitoring of actions.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Policy on Childhood and Adolescence (2024–2036):* Issued on April 18, 2024, after collaboration with direct stakeholders, and includes specific actions related to child labor and the protection of adolescent workers, including guidelines for compliance with regulations to guarantee the rights of minors and strengthening inter-institutional and inter-sectoral interventions for the prevention, detection, and comprehensive approach to situations of labor exploitation of minors. This new policy aims to align all government actions in defense and protection of the rights of the country's children and adolescents, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

National Policy Against Trafficking in Persons (2020–2030): Outlines goals and actions to prevent and combat human trafficking, as well as to strengthen human trafficking investigations and the sanctioning criminals. Serves as the framework for the National Coalition against Illicit Smuggling and Trafficking of Migrants and was active during the reporting period.

* Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Costa Rica funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, the identification of potential beneficiaries in rural areas remains a challenge.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Childcare and Development Network:‡ Provides comprehensive care and development services through daycare and education centers, including the Houses of Joy (Casas de la Alegría), which offer free childcare, healthcare, meals, and social protection services and mitigate the risk of child labor in agriculture. During the reporting period, the government sought to meet its goals, outlined in the National Development and Public Investment Plan (2023–2026), of providing subsidized childcare to 6,223 children aged 0 to 12 years, and delivering state support to 26,000 minors to facilitate access to childcare and development opportunities.

Conditional Cash Transfer Programs to Support Students:‡ Various Joint Social Welfare Institute (IMAS) and MTSS programs provide conditional cash transfers to families to keep children in school and out of exploitative work. In 2024, authorities identified areas with the highest concentration of minor individuals involved in child labor and hazardous adolescent labor, along with the distribution of the transfers by geographic area. This analysis made it possible to implement targeted strategies between IMAS and MTSS to promote a safe and protective environment for minors most vulnerable to child labor. As of September 2024, the “Let’s Get Ahead” (*Avancemos*) program had 281,998 participants and awarded \$115,540,874 to families with children aged 15 to 17 who are working. The program conditions cash transfer on the children remaining in school and ensuring that their work does not affect their education. Identification of potential beneficiaries in all geographical areas and coordination across implementing agencies is a challenge.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Costa Rica.

† 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