

Guinea-Bissau

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Guinea-Bissau made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved the Third National Plan for the Prevention and Combat of Trafficking in Persons and launched a 3-year project of approximately \$1.1 million, funded by the European Union, to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and public administration officials working on the prevention of cases of violence against *talibé* children. However, prohibitions against the commercial sexual exploitation of children do not meet international standards as the use of children in prostitution is not criminally prohibited. In addition, minimum age protections for work only apply to children with a formal employment contract, which does not comply with international standards that require all children to be protected. Finally, since basic education is free only through the sixth grade, children in grades seven through nine are left without access to free basic education.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	18.8% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	97.6%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	20.6%

Children in Guinea-Bissau are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Farming and fishing.
Industry	Working in construction, quarrying, and carpentry.
Services	Domestic work. Street work, including begging, shoe-shining and vending. Working as mechanics, including maintaining and repairing automobiles. Working in nightclubs,† including washing dishes and custodial work.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, mining, and street work, including begging. 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.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including children without a formal employment agreement.
	Ensure that the law establishes 18 as the minimum age for military conscription and that the law establishes safeguards for voluntariness for voluntary recruitment by the state military.
	Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the use of a child for prostitution.
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.
	Ensure that all 9 years of basic education are free.

Area	Suggested Action
	Ensure that all 9 years of basic education are free and increase the compulsory education age from 15 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.
Enforcement	Provide adequate funding and resources, including sufficient office space and transportation, to both law and criminal enforcement officials to carry out inspections and investigations on child labor and the worst forms of child labor cases throughout the country.
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating routine, targeted, and unannounced inspections based on the analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents.
	Publish information on criminal enforcement data for the reporting period, including whether penalties were imposed for the worst forms of child labor crimes.
	Establish a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor.
Government Policies	Approve a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.
Social Programs	Provide adequate resources to facilities, including shelters, that assist victims of the worst forms of child labor.
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, including in agriculture and street work, particularly begging.
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children by improving school infrastructure and providing transportation, particularly in rural areas.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Koranic students, known as *talibés*, from the eastern region of the country, such as Bafatá and Gabú, are particularly vulnerable to being exploited for forced begging by corrupt Koranic school teachers and organized networks of human traffickers affiliated with Koranic schools. Furthermore, human trafficking networks take advantage of the country's weak institutions and porous borders to transport large numbers of Bissau-Guinean boys to Senegal, and, to a lesser extent, to The Gambia, Guinea, and Mali, to beg on the streets for money and food. Bissau-Guinean girls from rural areas also face higher risks of being trafficked to urban areas, engaged in domestic work, or subjected to forced domestic work. Girls also face a higher risk of being subjected to commercial sexual exploitation.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Inadequate school infrastructure and long distances to schools, particularly in rural areas, are barriers to children's access to education in Guinea-Bissau. A lack of teachers and continuing teacher strikes due to unpaid salaries further impact children's access to education in the country.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Guinea-Bissau has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Guinea-Bissau's laws do not meet international standards on the minimum age for work because minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships. Additionally, laws do not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children because the use of children in prostitution is not criminally prohibited.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	16	X	Articles 1, 3, 288, 347, 350, and 520 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 354 and 355 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 354 and 355 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 2–4 and 15 of the Law to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking; Article 106 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Articles 2–4 and 15 of the Law to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		X	Articles 3–5 and 15 of the Law to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking; Articles 134 and 136 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Articles 3 and 7 of the Decree on Narcotic Substances
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	17	✓	Article 31 of Law No. 4/99
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	Articles 2, 23, and 42 of Law No. 4/99
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		X	
Compulsory Education Age	15‡	✓	Articles 12 and 13 of the Education System Law
Free Public Education		X	Article 12(2) of the Education System Law

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships, which is not in compliance with international standards that require all children to be protected by the law. In addition, the law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation because the use of children in prostitution is not criminally prohibited. Although the Education System Law states that basic education is compulsory and lasts 9 years, it makes basic education free only through grade six, leaving children in grades seven through nine without access to free basic education. Moreover, as the minimum age for work is 16, children aged 15 are vulnerable to exploitative child labor because they are not required to attend school while also not legally permitted to work. The military service law also falls below the international standard because 16 and 17 year olds can be conscripted and laws permit children aged 17 to voluntarily join the military without safeguards for voluntariness.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Guinea-Bissau took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient allocation of financial and human resources hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Public Administration, Labor, Employment and Social Security: Enforces child labor legislation in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Justice, and the National Institute for Women and Children (IMC). During the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior held the government's first forum with religious leaders focused on child protection issues, including child trafficking.

Criminal Enforcement Agencies: The Ministry of the Interior's Public Order Police and National Guard enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, and refer relevant cases to the IMC and NGOs for referral to social services providers, while the Judicial Police's Women and Children Brigade investigates cases involving the worst forms of child labor, apart from child trafficking, and refers them to the IMC and NGOs. The Brigade comprises 10 officers.

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	No
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes

In 2024, **21** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding **0** child labor violations. The government conducted **0** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, and **2** prosecutions were initiated, but **0** perpetrators were convicted.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Guinea-Bissau established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Interministerial Commission to Fight Child Labor: Coordinates the government's efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor. Led by IMC. During the reporting period, IMC collected data from various government agencies, including the Judicial Police, Migration and Border Services, and the National Guard using the database Kobo Toolbox, which captures data on crimes committed against women and children, including forced labor. However, these data have yet to be made publicly available. In October 2024, IMC also created and aired radio programs to raise awareness nationwide on child protection issues, including child trafficking, met with Koranic school leaders to discuss best practices, and continued to work with the Judicial Police, the Public Order Police, and Friends of the Child Association to identify, house, and reintegrate child labor victims.

Guinea-Bissau established policies related to child labor. However, the lack of implementation of these policies hindered efforts to address the worst forms of child labor, including forced child begging and commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Policy for the Protection of Children (2021–2032): Guides the government's policies for addressing violence toward children, including the worst forms of child labor. Although the policy's plan of action has yet to be approved by Parliament, NGOs, law enforcement agencies, and institutions working on child protection issues are already implementing its outlined procedures.

National Plan for the Prevention and Combat of Trafficking in Persons III (2024–2028):* Aims to strengthen the prevention, protection, and prosecution of human trafficking cases, specifically child trafficking cases. Advocates for a ban on begging throughout the country, particularly for children, focuses on the need for better understanding of the situation through studies and research, promotes adequate training of all relevant stakeholders, increases awareness-raising efforts, and works toward increasing the number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions. Approved during the reporting period.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Code of Conduct Against Sexual Exploitation in Tourism: Seeks to raise awareness of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, including in the Bijagós Archipelago, Bubaque, São Domingos, and Bissau regions. In 2024, the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Solidarity, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism, distributed awareness-raising materials, such as posters, stamps, banners, and bulletins, aimed at the commercial sexual exploitation of children in the tourism industry, particularly on Bijagós Islands and in Bissau.

* Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Guinea-Bissau funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating and preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors in which child labor has been identified, including in agriculture and street work.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Friends of the Child Association Shelters (Associação dos Amigos da Criança):‡ Donor-funded shelters, with government support, in Bissau and Gabú. Provide social services to vulnerable children, including victims of the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, a new center was opened in Bafatá with the capacity to house up to 30 children.

UN World Food Program:‡ School meals program reaching children in all regions of the country, with the aim of universal coverage by 2027. Also provides rations to school-aged girls and children with disabilities. During the reporting period, school meals were provided to 50 percent of the country's school children in grades 1 through 6.

Information and Advocacy for the Protection of Talibé Children in Guinea-Bissau (IMPACT-GB):‡ Approximately \$1.1 million, 3-year project funded by the EU and implemented by the International Medical Assistance Foundation, in partnership with IMC, the People-to-People Development Aid of Guinea-Bissau, and the Guinean Association for the Fight against Irregular Migration, Trafficking in Human Beings and Child Protection. The project aims to train youth and women's civil society organizations, as well as public administration officials, in prevention of cases of violence against *talibé* children. It also aims to promote the dissemination of information on the role of civil society organizations and local authorities in protecting children in vulnerable situations and raise community awareness, particularly in regions with child trafficking of *talibé* children. During the reporting period, the project conducted an awareness-raising campaign in affected communities.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Guinea-Bissau.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports