

Papua New Guinea

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Papua New Guinea made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government initiated 44 new modern biometric enrollment kits and integrated the Civil Registry and the National Identification into one system to improve birth registration numbers. However, despite this effort, the government’s hazardous work prohibitions do not comply with international standards because they do not prohibit children ages 16 and older from engaging in hazardous work; the international standard is 18. Furthermore, the country does not have laws that sufficiently protect children from commercial sexual exploitation as using, procuring, or offering a child for pornographic performances is not criminally prohibited. The prohibitions against child trafficking are also insufficient because they require that threats, the use of force, or coercion be established for the crime of child trafficking. Finally, the government does not have social programs to prevent and eliminate child labor, a formal mechanism for reporting and responding to children in need of protection, or adequate resources to enforce labor laws.

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	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	Unavailable

Children in Papua New Guinea are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children in Papua New Guinea also perform dangerous tasks in the mining and deep-sea fishing sectors.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Working in agriculture, including on palm oil plantations, fishing, and herding.
Industry	Work in manufacturing, mining, quarrying, and logging.
Services	Domestic work and street work, including vending, car washing, moving furniture, portering, and begging.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs. Forced labor in domestic work, the tourism sector, manual labor, street vending, and begging. Children also perform dangerous tasks in mining, agriculture, and deep-sea fishing.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of International Labor Organization Convention 182.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Accede to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography and to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.
	Raise the minimum age for light work from age 11 to age 13, and identify the types of activities and the number of hours per week that this work may be undertaken.
	Raise the minimum age for hazardous work from age 16 to age 18 and identify hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children.
	Criminally prohibit child trafficking regardless of establishment of threats, the use of force, or coercion.
	Criminally prohibit the use, procurement, and offering a child for pornographic performances.

Area	Suggested Action
	<p>Establish a law that prohibits using, procuring, or offering a child for illicit activities, including for the production and trafficking of drugs.</p> <p>Establish a law that criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.</p> <p>Establish by law free basic public education and a compulsory education age of 16 years to align with the minimum age for work.</p>
Enforcement	<p>Publish information on law enforcement efforts, including on labor inspectorate funding, the number of labor inspectors, the types of training labor inspectors receive, the number of inspections conducted at worksites, and whether routine and unannounced labor inspections were conducted. Also publish the number of child labor violations found and the number of child labor penalties that were imposed and collected.</p> <p>Employ at least 207 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 3.1 million people.</p> <p>Create a referrals system for reporting child labor cases; implement a data monitoring system to track incidents of child labor and a digital tracking system for worst forms of child labor; and establish a coordinating mechanism among labor enforcement, criminal law enforcement, and social services to ensure that child labor victims receive the necessary support and services.</p> <p>Provide labor inspectors with the funding necessary to conduct routine and targeted inspections, in addition to those that are complaint driven, in all areas of Papua New Guinea.</p> <p>Increase the number of officers conducting criminal investigations into child labor by providing the necessary resources and training.</p> <p>Publish information on criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of criminal investigations related to child labor initiated, the number of penalties imposed for child labor violations, and the number of criminal convictions secured.</p> <p>Standardize prosecutorial and law enforcement practices, and increase funding for prosecutorial and law enforcement bodies, such as the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary.</p>
Coordination	<p>Ensure that the National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee is active and holds regular meetings to implement strategies to combat human trafficking. Guarantee senior government leadership and participation in these meetings, and ensure that all relevant stakeholders, including NGOs, are invited to take part, as outlined in the Committee's mandate.</p> <p>Establish a coordinating mechanism to prevent and eliminate all worst forms of child labor.</p>
Government Policies	<p>Ensure that the National Child Protection Policy and the Government Tuition Fee Subsidy Policy are funded and implemented according to their mandates.</p> <p>Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as use in illicit activities, including selling drugs and forced labor in domestic work.</p>
Social Programs	<p>Support a national program to increase birth registration and provide identification to all children.</p> <p>Increase funding for school infrastructure improvements, including essentials such as electricity and technology. Ensure that teacher salaries are paid; transportation challenges for students are addressed; programs are instituted to address sex-based violence against girls in schools; adequate supplies of student materials, such as textbooks, are provided; no schools charge extra fees that compromise education access; and all schools have reliable water supplies.</p> <p>Implement and fully fund programs and services that assist children engaged in the worst forms of child labor in all relevant sectors, especially in commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work, and mining.</p> <p>Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.</p> <p>Ensure that Child Care Centers are active, fully funded, and publish their activities undertaken on an annual basis.</p>

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children without birth certificates in Papua New Guinea are at an increased risk for exploitation, including human trafficking and the worst forms of child labor. Only approximately 15 percent of children in the country have their birth registered.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Children in Papua New Guinea face multiple barriers to education. Unpaid teachers, a lack of transportation, aging infrastructure, and a lack of reliable water supplies and sanitation facilities have been exacerbated by the government frequently failing in its obligation to provide schools with sufficient funding. Natural disasters, such as flooding, volcanic activities, earthquakes, and disease outbreaks present acute risks to education access. Girls are at an increased risk of falling casualty to violence, which adversely affects school attendance. In total, 25 percent of primary and secondary school-age children do not attend school.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Papua New Guinea 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; the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography; or the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. In addition, Papua New Guinea's laws related to the minimum age for hazardous work do not meet international standards because Article 104 of the Employment Act sets the minimum age for engaging in hazardous labor activities at age 16 rather than age 18.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	16	✓	Article 103 of the Employment Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	16	X	Article 104 of the Employment Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		X	
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 23 and 43 of the Constitution of the Independent State of Papua New Guinea; Sections 208A – 208G of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		X	Sections 208A – 208G of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		X	Articles 229J–229O, 229R, and 229S of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		X	
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	16	✓	Section 30 of the Defense Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		X	
Compulsory Education Age		X	
Free Public Education		X	

* Country has no conscription

Papua New Guinea’s existing legal framework governing child labor does not meet international standards in a number of areas. Although Papua New Guinea meets international standards for the minimum age for work, Article 103 of the Papua New Guinea Employment Act permits children ages 11 through 16 to work under certain conditions, including with parental consent and if the child works only with members of the family. Children as young as age 11 are permitted to perform light work, but the law does not enumerate what forms of labor may be classified as “light work” and does not establish a limit on the number of hours a child under the age of 16 is permitted to work. Papua New Guinea’s existing law on the minimum age for hazardous work under Article 104 of Papua New Guinea’s Employment Act sets the minimum age for engaging in hazardous labor activities at age 16 rather than age 18. Additionally, the law does not list hazardous occupations or activities that are prohibited for children. The National Education Plan does not include an age up to which education is compulsory, and, although the Government Tuition Fee Subsidy Policy was expanded in 2023, the right to free education is not guaranteed by law.

Papua New Guinea also does not have laws that prohibit using, procuring, or offering a child for illicit activities, including for the production and trafficking of drugs. The law does not sufficiently protect children from commercial sexual exploitation because the acts of using, procuring, and offering a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited. Lastly, the prohibitions against child trafficking are insufficient because they require that threats, the use of force, or coercion be established for the crime of child trafficking.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

Enforcement agencies in Papua New Guinea took no documented actions to address child labor in 2024.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement	
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations: Directly employs all labor inspectors in the country and identifies hazards to which child workers are exposed in various sectors.	
The Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary: Papua New Guinea’s national police force; enforces criminal laws against child labor and human trafficking.	

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

In 2024, it is **unknown** how many labor inspectors conducted worksite inspections, the number of worksites inspected, or whether child labor violations were found. It is also **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Papua New Guinea established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, this mechanism does not address all forms of child labor in the country, including commercial sexual exploitation; use in illicit activities, including selling drugs; and forced domestic work.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
National Anti-Human Trafficking Committee (NAHTC): Coordinates efforts to address human trafficking. The NAHTC did not report meeting during the reporting period and research indicates it continues to lack sufficient resources and commitment from the government.

Papua New Guinea established policies related to child labor. However, the government did not report activities undertaken during the reporting period to implement these policies.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
Government Tuition Fee Subsidy Policy: Aims to improve access to education by abolishing school tuition fees and providing subsidies to cover costs for primary and secondary school children who cannot afford to pay for school-related expenses. The program subsidizes education for students from grades 1 to 12. However, some schools still charged parents project fees.
National Child Protection Policy (2017–2027): Seeks to strengthen child protection laws, including increased data gathering and analysis, the full implementation of the <i>Lukautim Pikinini</i> Act, and the elimination of violence against children at the hands of the police. However, research could not identify any activities undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.

Papua New Guinea funded and participated in a program that included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, this program is inadequate to address the problem in all sectors and in all states in which child labor has been identified, including in commercial sexual exploitation, use in illicit activities, and forced labor.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Child Care Centers: ‡ Provide a safe location for children removed by Child Protection Officers from situations deemed to be harmful to their health and safety. Research was unable to determine whether the Child Care Centers were active during the reporting period.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Papua New Guinea.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports