

São Tomé and Príncipe

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, São Tomé and Príncipe made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In coordination with the World Bank, the government increased the number of families that benefit from the Vulnerable Family Program from 2,830 to 5,000 families. Also, the number of labor inspections increased from 64 to 258. However, despite these efforts, the minimum age protections do not meet international standards as the Labor Code does not apply to children working outside of a formal labor relationship, such as children who are self-employed. Moreover, limited financial resources hampered law enforcement efforts, and policies do not address all worst forms of child labor in the country.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	14.2% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	92.5%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	23.3%

Children in São Tomé and Príncipe are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in construction and street work. Children also engage in child labor in farming.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Farming,† including weeding and fertilizing.† Fishing,† including line and hook fishing.
Industry	Construction,† carpentry, and woodworking.
Services	Working in shops, car repair, car washing, restaurants, and bars.† Street work,† including begging and street vending.†
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation.

† 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 São Tomé and Príncipe’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 the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.
	Apply minimum age for work laws to all children in formal and informal work relationships, including children who are self-employed.
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits practices similar to slavery or criminally prohibits debt bondage and forced or compulsory labor.
	Criminalize the use of all children under the age of 18 for prostitution.
	Ensure that the law establishes 16 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment by the state military with safeguards for voluntariness.
	Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

Area	Suggested Action
	Adopt legislation defining the activities and conditions permissible for light work.
	Require that children who are under age 14 and working under Article 269 of the Labor Code are permitted to work only in schools for general, vocational, or technical education, or in other training institutions.
Enforcement	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data identifying risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents, and ensure that inspections are conducted in the informal sector, in which child labor is known to occur.
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to ensure that all sectors in which child labor is occurring are monitored effectively, and equip labor inspectors with the adequate resources to conduct inspections, including office facilities, fuel, and transportation, all disbursed in a timely and efficient manner, and ensure that labor inspectors receive adequate technical training to strengthen their ability to perform their duties.
	Implement a digital tracking system for labor inspections.
	Ensure that citizens are aware of their ability to report suspected instances of child labor by publicizing the complaint mechanism sufficiently.
	Equip criminal investigators with the necessary resources, including transportation, fuel, and other necessities, to carry out investigations, and that they receive training to better address violations of the worst forms of child labor.
Coordination	Ensure that the Anti-Child Labor Committee is active and able to carry out its intended mandate.
Government Policies	Adopt policies to address the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.
	Increase access to education for children with disabilities, including creating programs that support children with mobility and hearing difficulties.
	Implement programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.
	Implement programs that specifically address child labor in agriculture.
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, specifically for at-capacity support centers that lack the resources to fully support exploited children.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

In São Tomé and Príncipe, children in poverty often work to assist their families. The highest prevalence rate of child labor in São Tomé and Príncipe is in the Norte-Oeste region, where 15 percent of all children are engaged in child labor.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Reports indicate that children with disabilities, especially those with mobility or hearing difficulties, may have limited access to education. In addition, an insufficient number of teachers hinders education access in the country.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

São Tomé and Príncipe 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 and UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In addition, São Tomé and Príncipe lacks minimum age protections for children working outside of a formal employment relationship.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	15	X	Articles 268(2) and 269 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 273(2), 274, and 536 of the Labor Code; Article 171 of the Civil Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Hazardous Work List in Annex IV of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		X	Articles 159 and 160 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Articles 160 and 181 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		X	Articles 179–182 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Articles 279, 280, and 289 of the Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment		X	
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	Article 1 of Decree-Law 3/83
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		X	
Compulsory Education Age	15‡	✓	Articles 11 and 12 of the Basic Education System Law
Free Public Education		✓	Article 12 of the Basic Education System Law

‡ Age calculated based on available information

Minimum age protections contained in the Labor Code do not apply to children working outside of a formal labor relationship, such as children who are employed. The Labor Code also permits children who have completed their compulsory education to perform light work that is not deemed harmful to their health or development; however, legislation specifying the activities and conditions in which light work may be undertaken has yet to be adopted. Article 269 of the Labor Code does not require that work done by those under age 14 be done in a school or as part of a training program, which is required to meet the exemption from the minimum age standard in ILO Convention 138, Article 6. Furthermore, laws prohibiting forced labor are not sufficient as they do not criminalize practices similar to slavery or debt bondage and forced or compulsory labor. Article 179 of the Penal Code criminalizes the use of minors between the ages of 14 and 17 in prostitution, but there is no statute that criminalizes the use of a child under age 14 for prostitution. Although the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe indicates that a written procedure allows 17-year-olds to volunteer for military service with a parent's permission, no law establishes a minimum age for voluntary recruitment and safeguards for voluntariness are not codified.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor law enforcement agencies in São Tomé and Príncipe took actions to address child labor. However, there were no documented actions by criminal law enforcement agencies.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
Ministry of Labor, Solidarity and Social Security: Hosts the labor inspectorate, which enforces labor laws, including child labor laws. During the reporting period, funding for the inspectorate was not disbursed in a timely manner, interfering with the inspectorate's ability to provide adequate resources and training.
Ministry of Justice, Parliamentary Affairs and Women's Rights: Enforces and prosecutes criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor through the Judiciary Police, the Public Prosecutor's office, and the courts.

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	N/A
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	N/A

In 2024, **11** labor inspectors conducted **258** worksite inspections, finding **0** child labor violations. As the government reported no worst forms of child labor complaints, it conducted **0** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated **0** prosecutions, and convicted **0** perpetrators.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

São Tomé and Príncipe established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, there is a lack of efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
Anti-Child Labor Committee: Leads efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The committee did not meet during the reporting period.

São Tomé and Príncipe established a policy related to child labor. However, this policy does not cover all worst forms of child labor in the country, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
National Policy and Strategy for Social Protection (2024–2028): Establishes social protection strategies aimed at eliminating extreme poverty over a 10-year time frame, reinforcing the rights of children, and addressing child labor. This policy guides the Directorate of Social Protection and Solidarity as it provides counseling and integration services to children identified through labor inspections and criminal investigations. Although the policy has been approved, it has yet to be implemented.

São Tomé and Príncipe funded programs that may contribute to preventing child labor. However, these social programs do not cover all worst forms of child labor, such as the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Support Centers: † Four government-supported centers run by NGOs, operating in areas with high concentrations of poor families, orphans, and street children. Three of the centers receive direct financial support from the government, and the fourth receives in-kind support as food donations. In addition, the support centers teach income-generating skills. The centers were active during the reporting period.
The Vulnerable Family Program: Funded by the World Bank and disbursed by the government, this program requires that children are in school to qualify. In May 2024, the government increased the number of families that benefit from the bi-monthly stipend of \$115 from 2,830 to 5,000 families.

† Program is funded by the Government of São Tomé and Príncipe.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports