

Suriname

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Suriname made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government ratified four International Labor Organization conventions, including Convention No. 129 on agricultural labor inspections. The government also adopted the National Education Policy (2024–2031), which guides efforts toward improving education, including for children in remote communities who are more vulnerable to child labor. However, despite these efforts, the compulsory education age falls below the minimum age for employment, leaving some children vulnerable to labor exploitation. In addition, while Suriname’s laws criminalize sexual acts with a minor under age 16, they do not criminally prohibit the use of a child under the age of 16 for commercial sex.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	7.2% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	95.3%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	7.3%

Children in Suriname are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in gold mining.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Forestry† and harvesting crops, including the use of dangerous equipment, carrying heavy loads,† and applying pesticides.† Fishing and hunting.
Industry	Gold mining,† including carrying heavy loads† and exposure to chemicals.† Construction† and wood processing.†
Services	Street work, including vending, domestic work, and airport luggage transportation.†
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs.

† 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 Suriname’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Increase the compulsory education age from age 12 to at least age 16, the minimum age for work.
	Criminally prohibit the military recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.
	Criminally prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including the use of a child under age 16 for prostitution.
	Criminally prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.

Area	Suggested Action
Enforcement	Publish information on the Labor Inspectorate’s budget, training conducted, and the number of worksite inspections conducted.
	Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate is sufficiently funded and adequately staffed to cover labor inspections in both the formal and informal sectors of the labor force, including in risk-prone sectors, such as in fisheries, mining and agricultural areas in which child labor is likely to occur, particularly in the interior of the country.
	Ensure that there are sufficient financial and operational resources, including for travel to the interior of the country, and that enforcement agencies, such as the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force, coordinate their responses.
	Implement a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor inspections.
	Ensure that the child labor referral system can adequately provide long-term solutions, including housing, to child labor cases that are reported to it.
Coordination	Ensure that the mechanism for coordination of government efforts to combat child labor has an active mandate.
Government Policies	Ensure that agencies responsible for the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor are effectively implementing the strategies.
Social Programs	Develop social programs to prevent and eradicate child labor in agriculture and mining, and ensure that existing programs reach those who are most vulnerable to child labor.
	Ensure adequate funding for government-sponsored social assistance programs that provide direct cash support to households with children, including the General Child Benefit program. Improve implementation and management of programs to ensure that families are aware of existing programs and are able to register for programs in locations outside of cities, and that funds are delivered on time to all beneficiaries registered in programs, especially children in underserved, remote, and rural communities.
	Strengthen specialized social services to assist child victims of human trafficking, including commercial sexual exploitation.
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers to education, particularly for children in the interior, by eliminating school-related fees, reducing transportation costs, increasing access to schools in remote locations, and improving teacher availability.
	Ensure that all children, including children of foreign-born parents, have access to free public education.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children in the interior of the country faced a higher risk for child labor than those in coastal areas due to limited access to education and limited government presence. Children in Suriname’s remote interior are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, including in illegal mining camps.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

In 2024, children in the interior of the country faced significant barriers to education, as schools remained closed for longer periods of time than schools in coastal areas. These closures were caused by a backlog in payments to companies transporting teachers to isolated villages. In addition, some teachers refused to travel to the interior due to conflict over outstanding salary payments, poor living conditions, and other issues with the Ministry of Education. The delay in reopening schools has led to children seeking other activities, including employment in artisanal gold mining. Children with disabilities face challenges accessing resources that specifically meet their educational needs. Although children who are not citizens of Suriname can access free public education if they provide a birth certificate and vaccination records, children have been prohibited from accessing school due to a lack of proper paperwork or language barriers. Boys, native children, Maroons, and children from rural interior districts experienced the most challenges in completing school.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Suriname has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Suriname's laws do not meet international standards, including insufficient prohibitions related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and a compulsory education age that is lower than the minimum age for work.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	16	✓	Articles 1 (j–l), 3, and 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 1 (k and l) and 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act; Article 1 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Articles 2 and 3 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth; Article 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 334, 338, and 339 of the Penal Code; Article 15 of the Constitution; Article 1 the Children and Young Persons Labor Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Article 334 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✗	Articles 291, 293, 297, 298, 303a, and 306 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✗	
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 9 of the Conscription Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✗	
Compulsory Education Age	12	✗	Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education
Free Public Education		✓	Articles 38 and 39 of the Constitution

* Country has no conscription

Suriname's laws do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children because while it is criminal to have a sexual relationship with a child under the age of 16, the use of a child under age 16 for commercial sex is not criminally prohibited. In addition, while the Penal Code establishes penalties for the production and trafficking of drugs, it does not specifically prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child for the production and trafficking of drugs. Moreover, Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education requires children to attend school only until they are 12 years old. This makes children ages 12 to 16 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are not legally required to attend school nor are they legally permitted to work.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Suriname took action to address child labor. However, gaps exist within the operations of agencies that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient human and financial resources.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs: Enforces laws related to child labor through its Labor Inspectorate and investigates labor trafficking cases. In 2024, three members of the Labor Inspectorate attended a training on child labor, which was hosted by the ILO and the Ministry of Labor in Brazil. Efforts by different agencies were often uncoordinated and underfunded, leading to gaps in the response.

Suriname Police Force: Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. Also includes the Trafficking in Persons Unit, which investigates and prosecutes cases of human trafficking and the worst forms of child labor, in collaboration with the Prosecutors' Office. In 2024, the Trafficking in Persons Unit conducted awareness-raising sessions in both the interior and coastal areas of Suriname, which covered human trafficking and the vulnerability of children to sex trafficking. The Trafficking in Persons Unit has insufficient staff to cover all parts of Suriname, particularly in the interior of the country.

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

In 2024, **50** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding **2** child labor violations. The government also conducted **2** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated **2** prosecutions, and convicted **2** perpetrators.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Suriname established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, the government has yet to renew the National Commission on Combating Child Labor's mandate.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

National Commission on Combating Child Labor (NCUK): Inter-departmental commission tasked with drafting and implementing legislation and policies to prevent and combat child labor. The mandate for this commission expired in 2023 and has not been renewed by the government. A proposal for an updated commission structure to include social organizations is awaiting approval. Despite this, core members of the commission continued to work on child labor prevention efforts in 2024.

Suriname established policies related to child labor. However, the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor lacked sufficient implementation.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor (2019–2024): Policy document which governed the response to preventing and combatting child labor. As the mandate of the NCUK, which is responsible for implementing the action plan, has not been renewed, there was little implementation of the plan during the reporting period, although the plan continued to be valid.

National Action Plan on Human Trafficking: Coordinates efforts of different government entities through the Trafficking in Persons Working Group, including members from the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Police, the Prosecutors' Office, and Immigration. The Trafficking in Persons Working Group effectively responds to human trafficking. During the reporting period, the Trafficking in Persons Working Group met monthly.

National Education Policy (2024–2031): * Adopted in September 2024 and aims to guide efforts toward inclusive and high-quality education for children, including those in remote communities. Includes reforms for the curriculum and teaching methods.

* Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Suriname funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs lack sufficient funding and did not reach potential beneficiaries who are the most at risk of child labor.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Decent Work Country Program: ILO program that supports capacity building of the Labor Inspectorate and constituents, as well as NCUK for implementing the National Action Plan. The Third Decent Country Work Program includes proactive strategies for the prevention of child labor, sustainable eradication of child labor, and promotion of decent work. Includes a multi-step plan to address child labor through legislative reform, effective enforcement, and improved referral systems. During the reporting period, the government continued to implement the 2023–2026 workplan.
General Child Benefit: ‡ Main program providing direct support to households with children, implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Public Housing and enshrined in law. Provides monthly grants of approximately \$5 to households with children whose heads of family are not otherwise entitled to family allowances. The General Child Benefit is not always received on time in interior and rural districts. The program was active during the reporting period.
Consolidating Access to Inclusive Quality Education in Suriname: ‡ Government program, supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, that began an initiative with the goal of providing inclusive access to all levels of education in Suriname, with a specific focus on supporting children in the interior and improving the quality of lower secondary education. In 2024, the Ministry of Education implemented projects to develop an education curriculum intended to meet the needs of employers.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Suriname.
† 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