

In 2017, Maldives made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the Labor Relations Authority of the Ministry of Economic Development hired additional labor inspectors and the Maldives Police Service launched a case management system for victims of human trafficking, including children. Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of trafficking. The government has not determined specific hazardous occupations or activities that are prohibited for children, and the law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children. Moreover, the government does not have a coordinating mechanism or policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor in the country.

I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of trafficking. (1; 2; 3) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Maldives.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	3.9 (2,364)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	79.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		95.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (4)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey, 2009. (5)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work (1; 3)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 3)
	Use in the trafficking of drugs (6)
	Forced labor in domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 3)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

No current data are available on child labor in Maldives, and a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. Some girls from Bangladesh and Maldives are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation to Malé, the capital of Maldives, but evidence of the problem is limited. (3)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Maldives has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).



Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓

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Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor (cont)

	Convention	Ratification
	UN CRC	✓
	UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Maldives' legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including determining the types of hazardous work prohibited for children.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Section 6 of the Employment Act (7)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 7 of the Employment Act (7)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Section 3 of the Employment Act; Sections 12–16 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (7; 8)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 12–15 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (8)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 17–19 of the Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (9)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 133(c)(1) of the Drugs Act (10)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children (2)
Non-state	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children (2; 11)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children (2; 11)

* No conscription (12)

The law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as procuring children for prostitution is not criminally prohibited. The law also does not criminally prohibit using, procuring, and offering children for pornographic performances. (9) In addition, the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups is not prohibited.

Research did not uncover a public version of the 2014 amendment to the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children for review.

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Labor Relations Authority (LRA) of the Ministry of Economic Development (MED) that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Labor Relations Authority (LRA), Ministry of Economic Development (MED)	Enforce the child labor provisions of the Employment Act. Make recommendations to MED on penalties, such as fines. (2)
Family and Child Protection Department, Maldives Police Service (MPS)	Investigate complaints of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Refer cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for prosecution and the Ministry of Gender and Family to provide victim services. (2) Employs eight officers in Malé to investigate child labor cases, including child commercial sexual exploitation and child pornography cases. (2)
Family Child Protection Services, Ministry of Gender and Family	Receive referrals of children who have been exploited, including in child commercial sexual exploitation, and provide care for such victims. (2)
Anti-Human Trafficking Units, MPS	Investigate human trafficking-related offenses and enforce laws prohibiting trafficking in persons. Employs five officers to investigate human trafficking cases. (2)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2017, labor law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the LRA of the MED that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the lack of referral mechanisms.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (2)	Unknown (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	9 (2)	13 (6)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (2)	Yes (6)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	No (6)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	No (6)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	264 (2)	288 (6)
Number Conducted at Worksites	264 (2)	288 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (2)	0 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	N/A	N/A (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	N/A	N/A (6)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (2)	Unknown (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (2)	Yes (6)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	No (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (2)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (2)	No (6)

The LRA lacks the resources necessary to enforce child labor laws. Inspectors have not received training on the identification and remediation of child labor. (2; 13) In addition, although the Inspectorate is authorized to assess penalties, no fines were issued in practice. (6; 7)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Family and Child Protection Department of the Maldives Police Service (MPS) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including lack of training for new criminal investigators.

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Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (2)	No (6)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	Yes (6)
Number of Investigations	10 (2)	21 (6)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (2)	Unknown (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	1 (2)	Unknown (6)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (2)	0 (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (6)

Investigators have insufficient funding and resources, such as office facilities and transportation. (6; 14) During the reporting period, the MPS, in partnership with IOM Maldives and the USDOS, launched the first case management system dedicated to victims of human trafficking, including children. The system also includes a website through which the public can report suspected trafficking cases to the MPS. (6) However, police and other officials have inadequate training on procedures for identifying human trafficking victims and providing referrals to protective services, including for children. (3) In addition, the MPS lacked the capacity to pursue child trafficking investigations. (15)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address all forms of child labor.

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
Anti-Human Trafficking National Steering Committee	Coordinate anti-human trafficking activities and implement the country's National Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan under MED leadership and 11 participating government agencies. (8; 14) Research was unable to determine whether this coordinating body was active during the reporting period.

Although the government has established a coordination mechanism on human trafficking, research found no evidence of mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address all child labor, including its worst forms.

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including covering all forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan (2015–2019)	Sets out the government's goals to combat human trafficking, including establishing institutions, coordinating activities, raising awareness, and building capacity. (16) The government continued its efforts under the Action Plan during the reporting period. (6)

During the reporting period, the government continued to enforce the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan. The Ministry of Gender and Family drafted a 2-year National Action Plan on Violence Against Children aimed at protecting children from all forms of abuse. This Action Plan has yet to be finalized and adopted by the Government of Maldives. (6) Research found no evidence of a policy to address child labor specifically.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including addressing the categorical worst forms of child labor.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Family and Child Service Centers†	Nineteen Ministry of Gender and Family-operated centers, which provide psychosocial support for child victims of abuse and exploitation. Four of the 19 centers provide temporary shelter for victims. (6)
National Victim Support Hotline (Number 1696)†	MED-operated hotline dedicated to receiving reports of human trafficking and child labor. Supported by the MPS and Maldives Immigration. (17) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement this program during the reporting period.
Child Helpline (Number 1412)†	Ministry of Gender and Family-operated helpline established with the support of the MPS and UNICEF to receive reports of child abuse cases. (6)

† Program is funded by the Government of Maldives.

Existing social programs do not specifically address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, or forced labor in domestic work. Family and Child Services centers and shelters lack adequate financial and human resources, and staff are inadequately trained to deal with cases involving abused and exploited children. (2; 6)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Maldives (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Determine the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2009 – 2017
	Criminally prohibit all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including procuring children for prostitution and procuring, offering, and using children for pornographic performances.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2017
	Make publicly available the 2014 amendment to the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children.	2016 – 2017
Enforcement	Collect and publish information on labor law enforcement, including the Labor Inspectorate funding and number of targeted inspections, as well as the number of violations found and prosecutions initiated involving criminal law enforcement of the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2017
	Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate receives training that specifically focuses on child labor issues, including training for new employees.	2009 – 2017
	Strengthen the inspection system by conducting unannounced inspections.	2017
	Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate receives adequate resources to enforce child labor laws.	2017
	Establish a referral mechanism between labor authorities and social services.	2016 – 2017
	Provide sufficient funding and training to the police and prosecutors, and ensure that investigators have the resources necessary to enforce laws on the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2017
Coordination	Establish a coordination mechanism to combat child labor.	2009 – 2017
	Publish information about the activities undertaken by the Anti-Human Trafficking National Steering Committee.	2017
Government Policies	Adopt a policy to address the worst forms of child labor.	2014 – 2017
Social Programs	Conduct a national child labor survey and publish the results.	2014 – 2017
	Conduct and publish research on the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children.	2009 – 2017
	Publish information about the implementation of the National Victim Support Hotline.	2017
	Implement and provide sufficient resources for programs that address the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the use of children for drug trafficking, and forced labor in domestic work.	2009 – 2017

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