

In 2017, Liberia made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the year, the government finalized the draft National Action Plan on Child Labor and launched the National Child Welfare and Protection Policy that focuses on the implementation and enforcement of child labor laws. The government also operated a shelter and case management system for vulnerable street children. However, children in Liberia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of rubber, and mining gold and diamonds. The Liberia National Police's Women and Children Protection Section and the National Commission on Child Labor continue to lack sufficient resources to conduct investigations and enforce child labor laws. A key gap in the legal framework is that the compulsory education age is lower than the minimum age for work.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Liberia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced domestic work. (1) Children also perform dangerous tasks in the production of rubber, and mining of gold and diamonds. (2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Liberia.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	16.6 (136,340)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	75.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	14.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		59.0

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2014, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (3)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Labor Force Survey, 2010. (4)

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

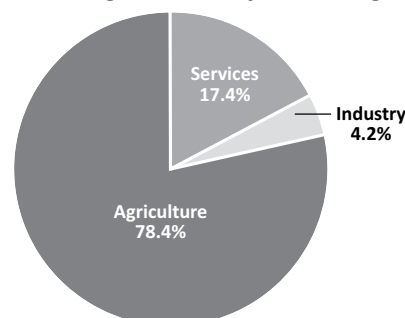
Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of rubber, including cutting trees with machetes and using acid (2; 5; 6; 7; 8) Production of charcoal (2; 5) Farming activities, including production of cocoa, coffee, cassava, and sugarcane (5; 9; 10)
Industry	Mining† diamonds and gold activities, including washing gravel and using mercury and cyanide (6; 9; 11; 12; 8) Cutting and crushing stone (2; 6; 9; 11; 13; 7) Construction, including carrying heavy loads† (2; 6; 11; 7)
Services	Domestic work (11; 7) Street work, including vending, begging, hawking goods, and carrying heavy loads (5; 6; 14; 7; 15; 16)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (11; 17) Forced labor in domestic work, street vending, mining, begging, and work on rubber plantations, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1; 11; 18) Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (19; 20; 8)

† 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.

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Liberia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Liberian children are sometimes victims of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work, forced begging, and forced labor in street vending, alluvial diamond mining, artisanal gold mining, and in the production of rubber. Children are also trafficked from Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. (6; 8) Research found that there is a difference in child labor activities in rural communities, compared to urban communities. (13) Children in rural communities, like Margibi County, engage in rubber tapping and coal burning activities to a greater degree, whereas children in cities and surrounding urban communities, particularly Monrovia and the communities in Montserrado County, crush rocks, work in homes, and sell goods. (13) The government has yet to collect comprehensive data on child labor activities to inform policies and social programs. (7)





Section 9 of the Children's Law mandates free primary education from grades 1–9, but the cost of uniforms, transportation, books, and school supplies limits access to education for some children. For secondary school (grades 10–12) students, reports indicate there is a shortage of teachers and learning materials, and a lack of educational facilities and transportation that limit access to education (7) Moreover, some teachers sexually exploit students in schools by coercing them with the promise of good grades, resulting in children avoiding or dropping out of school. (10; 7; 19). Reports also indicate the ongoing practice of sending boys and girls to initiation “bush schools” for rituals that traditionally were intended to transition a child into adulthood. Boys transition into what is referred to as the *Poro society* by undergoing rituals such as tattooing and circumcision, among others. (7) The initiation of girls into the *Sande society* may include female genital mutilation and other rituals. This practice often interferes with official schooling and can lead to girls dropping out of school, early marriage, and teenage pregnancy. (7) Children removed to participate in these initiation ceremonies are vulnerable to child labor because they may not return to formal schools. (7)

Liberian parents are required by law to register their infants within 14 days of birth. (21) Birth registration is technically required for parents to enroll their children in school. However, fewer than 5 percent of births are registered. (22; 23) Children who are not enrolled in school are more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Liberia has ratified some 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	✓
 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 Liberia's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the gap between the compulsory education age and minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Section 74 of the Labor Law (24)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 7, Section 9.1 of the Children's Law (25)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 21.4 of the Decent Work Act (6; 26)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 12 of the Constitution; Article 2.2 of the Decent Work Act; Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (25; 26; 27; 28)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (25; 28)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3, Section 21 of the Children's Law; Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia (25; 26; 28)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Chapter 16 of the Penal Law (26; 29)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (25)
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (25)
Non-state	Yes		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (25)
Compulsory Education Age	No	15	Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law; Chapter 4 of the Education Reform Act (25; 30)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law (25)

* No conscription (31)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (30; 25)

Children in Liberia are required to attend school only up to, but not including, age 15. This standard makes 15-year-old children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are not required to attend school, but they are not legally permitted to work until age 16. (30; 25) Although Section 74 of the Labor Law prohibits employment of children under age 16, the penalty of a fine of \$1.18 (100 Liberian dollars) for those who violate the law is not sufficient to deter offenders. (24; 32)

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, the exceptionally low number of worksite inspections conducted at the national level in Liberia impeded the enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Conduct worksite inspections and address child labor violations. (6; 9)
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP)	Assist the MOL with the investigation of child labor cases and act as the lead advisory agency on policy formulation, coordination, and monitoring of child protection policies through its Children Protection and Development Division. Monitor the government's efforts on compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UN CRC, and the African Union protocols on women and children. (32; 7)
Liberia National Police (LNP) Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS)	Investigate human trafficking cases involving women and children under the guidance of the LNP. (33)
LNP Anti-Trafficking Unit	Ensure that human trafficking training is integrated into police orientation. Collaborate with the WACPS to investigate human trafficking cases. (23)
Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization	Enforce the Alien and Nationality Law of Liberia and protect the border from illegal entry of migrants. Aid in combating human trafficking by detecting fraudulent immigration documents. (9)
Liberian Transnational Crime Unit	Coordinate responses to international organized criminal activities, including monitoring and prosecuting criminal violations involving arms, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. (7)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Promote and execute the rule of law for public safety, including the prosecution of child labor perpetrators. (34)

Liberia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2017, the exceptionally low number of worksite inspections conducted at the national level in Liberia impeded the enforcement of child labor laws (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown* (2)	Unknown* (7)
Number of Labor Inspectors	31 (2)	31 (7)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (7)	No (7)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (2)	N/A (7)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	Yes (35)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	486 (2)	2 (7)
Number Conducted at Worksites	486 (2)	2 (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (2)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	N/A (2)	N/A (7)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	N/A (2)	N/A (7)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (2)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (2)	Yes (7)

*The government does not publish this information.

The Ministry of Labor's budget for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 is \$1.7 million, but the amount of funding dedicated to the labor inspectorate remains unknown. (36) Research was unable to determine the cause for the significant decline in the reported number of inspections during the year. Generally, labor inspections are conducted in the formal sector instead of the informal sector where children are found engaging in child labor. (2) In addition, the lack of funding and logistical support results in the underutilization of the labor inspectorate's complaint mechanism. (7; 33)

Although inspectors cannot assess penalties, they can impose corrective measures such as issuing fines, notices of compliance, and filing a complaint with the hearing board. (7; 33) The lack of penalty assessment authorization and limited funding hamper the inspectorate's enforcement of child labor laws. (2; 7; 37) Moreover, the number of labor inspectors is slightly insufficient for the size of Liberia's workforce, which includes approximately 1.6 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, Liberia would employ roughly 42 labor inspectors - which would require the hiring of 11 additional inspectors to meet this threshold. (38; 39)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Liberia took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Liberia National Police (LNP) that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including financial resource allocation.

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	N/A (2)	N/A (7)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (2)	N/A (7)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (2)	Yes (7)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (cont)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Number of Investigations	162 (2)	Unknown* (7)
Number of Violations Found	128 (2)	Unknown* (7)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (2)	4 (8)
Number of Convictions	0 (2)	4 (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (7)

*The government does not publish this information.

In 2017, law enforcement agencies conducted investigations to combat child trafficking, but research was unable to determine the overall number of investigations or violations found. (40) During the year, four human traffickers, two Sierra Leoneans and two Liberians, were prosecuted and convicted for trafficking two Sierra Leonean girls. The main perpetrator received a 10-year jail sentence and the others received lesser sentences. (7; 8)

The LNP reported limited funding to carry out its enforcement duties. (6) During the year, LNP officers, Liberia Immigration Service officers, and a Ministry of Justice prosecutor attended the UNODC training in Ghana that focused on ways to strengthen enforcement capacity to address migrant smuggling in Liberia. (7) The LNP's Women and Children Protection Section also reported having limited resources to conduct investigations, including a lack of vehicles, fuel, sufficient training, finances, communications equipment, and investigative equipment. (6; 41) In addition, the data on the Ministry of Justice's prosecuted child endangerment cases are not disaggregated for child labor violations. (2; 6)

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 child labor, including financial support of the National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL).

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

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL)	Coordinate government and civil society activities concerning child labor. Led by the MOL and comprising representatives from 16 organizations, including international and civil society organizations. (42) May assist in coordinating child labor investigations. (43) Seek to reform national child labor laws and create a national child labor database, which would assist surveys on the extent of child labor issues in Liberia. (42)
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Implement child labor policies. Chaired by the MOL and comprising government officials and workers' organizations. (6) Includes four subcommittees on resource mobilization, advocacy, training and legal development, and monitoring and evaluation. Met quarterly during the reporting period. (44; 45; 33)
Child Protection Network	Coordinate child protection efforts through monthly meetings to discuss child protection issues, including child labor and human trafficking. Chaired by the MoGCSP, comprises the MOL, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the WACPS, civil society organizations, and several NGOs. (11) Also coordinates referrals of child victims of abuse to social services providers, with support from international and national organizations. (9) Met during the reporting period. (46; 33)
Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force	Coordinate anti-human trafficking activities. Chaired by the MOL, comprises the Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization; the LNP; and representatives from the MOJ, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Internal Affairs. (7)

During 2017, the NACOMAL reported it had a budget for salaries but no budget allocated for program activities; however, staff received child labor training and attended workshops through the CLEAR II project. (7)

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 mainstreaming child labor issues into relevant policies.

Liberia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan for Trafficking in Persons	Outlines the government's anti-human trafficking efforts, including those for child victims. (9) Research found no information about accomplishments during the year.
Direct Assistance and Support to Trafficked Victims Standard Operation Procedures	Establishes roles and responsibilities for coordinating government assistance to human trafficking victims. (23) Provides shelter and care to children who may have been human trafficking victims. (47) Research found no information about accomplishments during the year.
National Social Welfare Policy	Prioritizes the development of action plans and policies that target children engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking. (48) Research found no information about accomplishments during the year.

In 2017, the government finalized the draft National Action Plan on Child Labor that is awaiting endorsement by the Cabinet. Moreover, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection launched the National Child Welfare and Protection Policy, focused on the child labor laws implementation and enforcement. (7) However, the government did not renew key policies that may have a direct or indirect impact on child labor victims such as the National Strategy for Child Survival or the National Health Policy; policies that should address the issue of rehabilitation and care to child laborers. Child labor elimination and prevention strategies are not included in these policies: Revised National Youth Policy, Education Sector Plan, Rubber Industry Master Plan, and the National Employment Policy. (49; 50; 51; 52; 53; 54; 55; 56)

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 adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor‡

Program	Description
Anti-Trafficking Awareness Campaign†	Government of Liberia program led by the MOL, uses radio and billboard messages to raise public awareness on human trafficking. (10; 23) Inactive during the year due to lack of funding. (33)
Shelter†	MoGCSP operated shelter for vulnerable street children that includes case management system. (7) Served 97 children in 2017. (33)
USDOL-Funded Projects to Combat Child Labor	Actions to Reduce Child Labor in Areas of Rubber Production (2012–2017): \$6.2 million project implemented by Winrock International to combat child labor in the rubber sector. Provided 3,700 households with livelihood services and 10,126 children with education services. Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues (2011–2017): \$15.9 million project implemented by the ILO that aims to build the capacity of the national government and develop strategic policies to address the elimination of child labor and forced labor in Liberia. County Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor (CLEAR) II (2016–2018): implemented by Winrock International and partners Verité and Lawyers Without Borders to build the capacity of the government to address child labor. (2; 57; 58) Additional information is available on the USDOL website. In March 2017, the ARCH project, in collaboration with the MOL, hosted the National Sustainability Conference to discuss measures to sustain efforts to combat child labor, including integrating child labor prevention strategies into development frameworks, policies, and programs. (59; 60)
U.S. Government-Funded Projects on Education for Adolescent Girls	U.S. Government-funded projects that aim to improve access to education and improve child protection. Includes New Accelerated Quality Education Activity (2016–2019), a \$33.9 million USAID-funded project implemented by the Education Development Center; Providing Support for the Education of Girls with Disabilities, implemented by USAID with partnership and support from Liberia's Ministry of Education; Increasing Support for Out-of-School Girls and Youth, implemented by USAID; Advancing Youth Program, implemented by the Education Development Center; McGovern-Dole International Food For Education and Child Nutrition Program; and Girls Leading Our World Camps (2014–2017), implemented by the Peace Corps. (61; 62; 63) Through programs of the USDOS Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, female high school students participate in short and long-term exchanges to promote education, empowerment, and leadership skills. (47)
Liberia Social Safety Nets Project (2017–2021)*	World Bank-funded \$10 million project that aims to establish key national safety net delivery systems and provide support for low-income households. MoGCSP is the Government of Liberia's implementing agency. (64)

* Program was launched during the year.

† Program is funded by the Government of Liberia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (65; 66; 67; 68; 69; 70; 71; 72)

During the year, the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and the Ministry of Labor, with support from USAID and UNDP, conducted a 2017 Labor Force Survey; the survey reportedly includes a child labor component. The results will be analyzed and released in 2018. (7) Although the government funds social programs, they are not sufficient to address child labor, including in domestic work, the production of rubber, and mining gold and diamonds.

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 Liberia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.	2013 – 2017
	Ensure that penalties for employing children under the minimum age for work are stringent enough to deter violations.	2014 – 2017
	Raise the compulsory education age to be consistent with the minimum age for employment.	2016 – 2017
Enforcement	Authorize the Labor Inspectorate to assess penalties for child labor violations.	2017
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO technical advice.	2017
	Conduct an adequate number of worksite inspections to combat child labor, including its worst forms.	2017
	Publish information about the Labor Inspectorate's funding, and the number of child labor violations found.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted in the informal sector where children are found working.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate's complaint mechanism is adequately supported and operational.	2017
	Ensure adequate funding for child labor enforcement agencies, such as the MOL, the LNP, and the WACPS, and provide necessary training for such officials to enforce child labor laws.	2010 – 2017
	Disaggregate the child endangerment cases prosecuted through the Ministry of Justice to determine the number of child labor violations.	2016 – 2017
	Publish information about the criminal law enforcement's investigations and violations found related to the worst forms of child labor.	2017
Coordination	Ensure adequate funding for NACOMAL program activities to address child labor.	2017
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into relevant policies.	2010 – 2017
	Renew or develop policies that improve youth literacy rates and improve the health care delivery system, such as the National Strategy for Child Survival and the National Health Policy.	2015 – 2017
	Publish information about the activities taken to implement policies that address child labor.	2017
Social Programs	Collect comprehensive data through research to determine the activities carried out by children working in construction to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2017
	Improve access to education by subsidizing the cost of school fees and reduce barriers to education by building additional schools, addressing sexual abuse in schools, and ensuring that children are registered at birth.	2012 – 2017
	Ensure children are not prematurely removed from school to attend "bush schools."	2017
	Ensure the implementation of Anti-Trafficking Awareness campaigns.	2017
	Expand existing social programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, especially in domestic work, the production of rubber, and mining gold and diamonds.	2009 – 2017

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