

In 2018, Liberia made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the government significantly increased the number of labor inspectors from 31 to 50. In addition, the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force collaborated with international organizations, NGOs, and high-level officials to conduct a two-month long public awareness campaign around World Day Against Trafficking. 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 the mining of 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. The compulsory education age is also lower than the minimum age for work, making 15-year-old children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are not required to attend school while also not legally permitted to work until age 16. In addition, social programs are not sufficient to address the scope of the problem in the country, particularly where child labor is prevalent.



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 the mining of gold and diamonds. (2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Liberia.

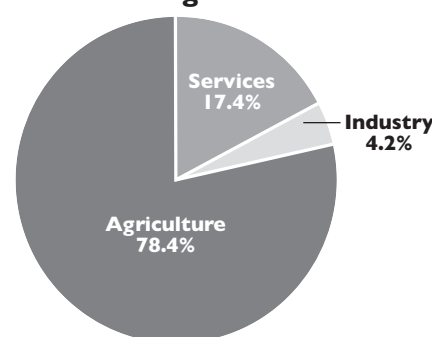
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

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, 2019. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Labor Force Survey, 2010. (4)

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



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 (1,2,5,6)
	Production of charcoal (2)
	Farming activities, including production of cocoa, coffee, cassava, and sugarcane (7,8)
Industry	Mining† diamonds and gold activities, including washing gravel and using mercury and cyanide (1,9,10)
	Cutting and crushing stone (2,5,6,11)
	Construction, including carrying heavy loads† (2,5,6)
Services	Domestic work (6)
	Street work, including vending, begging, hawking goods, and carrying heavy loads (5,6,12-14)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (15)
	Forced labor in domestic work, street vending, mining, begging, and work on rubber plantations, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (10,1)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,16,17)

† 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.

Liberian children are sometimes victims of human trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work, forced begging; and of forced labor in street vending, alluvial diamond mining, artisanal gold mining, and in the production of rubber. Children are also transported from Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. (1,5) Research found that there is a difference in child labor activities in rural communities compared to urban communities. Children in rural communities, like Margibi County, engage in rubber tapping and coal burning activities to a greater degree; children in cities and surrounding urban communities, particularly Monrovia and the communities in Montserrado County, crush rocks, work in homes, and sell goods. (11) The government has yet to collect comprehensive data on child labor activities to inform policies and social programs. (6)







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 students (grades 10–12), reports indicate there is a shortage of teachers, insufficient learning materials, a lack of educational facilities, and inadequate transportation, all of which limit access to education. (6) Moreover, by coercing students with the promise of good grades, some teachers sexually exploit students, resulting in children avoiding or dropping out of school. (6,8,16) 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. (18) 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. (6,18) Children removed from school to participate in initiation ceremonies are vulnerable to child labor since many do not return to school after the ceremonies. (18)

Liberian parents are required by law to register their infants within 14 days of birth. (19) Birth registration is technically required for parents to enroll their children in school. However, only 25 percent of children under age 5 have birth certificates. (20) 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	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Section 74 of the Labor Law (21)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 7, Section 9.1 of the Children's Law (22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Article 21.4 of the Decent Work Act (5,23)
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 (22-25)
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 (22,25)
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 (22,23,25)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act; Chapter 16 of the Penal Law (23,26)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (22)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (22)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law (22)
Compulsory Education Age	No	15	Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law; Chapter 4 of the Education Reform Act (22,27)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law (22)

* No conscription (28)

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. (22,27) Although Section 74 of the Labor Law prohibits employment of children under age 16, the penalty of a fine of less than \$1 for violations is insufficient to deter offenders. (21,29)

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)	Conducts worksite inspections and addresses child labor violations. (5,7)
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSPP)	Assists the MOL with the investigation of child labor cases and acts as the lead advisory agency on policy formulation, coordination, and monitoring of child protection policies through its Children Protection and Development Division. Monitors 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. (6,30)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (Cont.)

Organization/Agency	Role
Liberia National Police (LNP) Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS)	Investigates human trafficking cases involving women and children under the guidance of the LNP. (31)
LNP Anti-Trafficking Unit	Ensures that human trafficking training is integrated into police orientation. Collaborates with the WACPS to investigate human trafficking cases. (32)
Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization	Enforces the Alien and Nationality Law of Liberia and protects the border from illegal entry of migrants. Aids in combating human trafficking by detecting fraudulent immigration documents. (7)
Liberian Transnational Crime Unit	Coordinates responses to international organized criminal activities, including monitoring and prosecuting criminal violations involving arms, human trafficking, and drug trafficking. (6)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Promotes and executes the rule of law for public safety, including the prosecution of child labor perpetrators. (33)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, labor law enforcement agencies in Liberia took actions to enforce labor laws (Table 6). However, gaps continue to exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the worst forms of child labor.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (6)	Unknown (10)
Number of Labor Inspectors	31 (6)	50 (10)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (6)	No (10)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	N/A (6)	Yes (10)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (6)	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (34)	Yes (10)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	2 (6)	450 (10)
Number Conducted at Worksite	2 (6)	50 (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (6)	Unknown (10)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (6)	N/A (10)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (6)	N/A (10)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Yes (10)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (6)	Yes (10)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (6)	Yes (10)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Yes (10)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (6)	Yes (10)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (10)

The MOL's collective budget for fiscal years 2017 and 2018 is \$1.7 million, but the amount of funding dedicated to the labor inspectorate remains unknown. (35) Research was unable to determine the cause for the significant increase in the reported number of inspections during the year. Generally, labor inspections are conducted in the formal sector instead of the informal sector, in which children are most likely to be 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. (6,31)

In 2018, the MOL reported an increase from 31 to 50 in the number of labor inspectors. (10) Although inspectors cannot assess penalties, they can impose corrective measures such as issuing fines and notices of compliance, and filing a complaint with the hearing board. (6,31) The lack of penalty assessment authorization and limited funding hamper the inspectorate's enforcement of child labor laws. (2,6,36)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, 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	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	N/A (6)	Unknown (10)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (6)	Unknown (10)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (6)	Yes (10)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (6)	Unknown (10)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (6)	Unknown (10)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	4 (37)	Unknown (10)
Number of Convictions	4 (37)	Unknown (10)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (10)

Although the government did not provide comprehensive data on the number of prosecutions or convictions, reports indicate a female accused of trafficking two Sierra Leoneans into Liberia with the intention of selling them into forced labor, including a child, was successfully prosecuted and convicted during the reporting period. The accused received a sentence of eight years imprisonment. (1,10,38)

The LNP reported limited funding to carry out its enforcement duties. (5) 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. (5,39) In addition, data on the number of child endangerment cases prosecuted by the Ministry of Justice are not disaggregated for child labor violations. (2,5)

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 adequate 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 & Description
National Commission on Child Labor (NACOMAL)	Coordinates government and civil society activities concerning child labor. Led by the MOL and comprising representatives from 16 organizations, including international and civil society organizations. (40) Assists in coordinating child labor investigations. (41) Seeks 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. (40) During the reporting period, NACOMAL held meetings with outside stakeholders on child labor, participated in steering committee meetings, and coordination with the trafficking in persons Secretariat on anti-human trafficking efforts. (42)
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Implements child labor policies. Chaired by the MOL and comprising government officials and workers' organizations. (5) Includes four subcommittees on resource mobilization, advocacy, training and legal development, and monitoring and evaluation. The Steering Committee held approximately one meeting per quarter during the reporting period. (42)
Child Protection Network	Coordinates child protection efforts through monthly meetings to discuss child protection issues, including child labor and human trafficking. Chaired by the MOGCSP, comprising MOL, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, WACPS, civil society organizations, and several NGOs. (7) With support from international and national organizations, coordinates referrals of child victims of abuse to social services providers. (7) In 2018, the Network met regularly throughout 10 months of the year, and some of its members participated in a 2-day workshop on child protection. (10)
Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force	Coordinates anti-human trafficking activities. Chaired by MOL, comprising the Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization; LNP; and representatives from MOJ, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Internal Affairs. (6) Met regularly during the reporting period. (38)

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During 2018, the NACOMAL reported it had a budget for salaries but no budget allocated for program activities. (10)

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.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan on Elimination of Child Labor†	Aims to reduce child labor and the worst forms of child labor by 50 percent by 2030. Establishes three strategic objectives, including increasing public awareness on the causes and consequences of the worst forms of child labor; strengthening the legal and institutional frameworks in order to reduce child labor; and increasing social services and protection for children of vulnerable households. (42)
National Action Plan for Trafficking in Persons	Outlines the government's anti-human trafficking efforts, including those for child victims. (7) Although the current Plan expired in December 2018, the government extended it until June 2019 while it began drafting a new Action Plan covering 2019–2024. The new Plan was finalized in March 2019. (38)
National Child Welfare and Protection Policy	Focuses on the implementation and enforcement of existing child protection laws. (6) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Child Welfare and Protection Policy.
Direct Assistance and Support to Trafficked Victims Standard Operation Procedures	Establishes roles and responsibilities for coordinating government assistance to human trafficking victims. (32) Provides shelter and care to children who may have been human trafficking victims. (43) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Direct Assistance and Support to Trafficked Victims Standard Operation Procedures during the reporting period.
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. (44) Research could not determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Social Welfare Policy during the reporting year.

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the government did not renew key policies that may have a direct or indirect impact on child labor victims, including the National Strategy for Child Survival or the National Health Policy, both of which are policies that should address the issue of rehabilitation and care to child laborers. In addition, child labor elimination and prevention strategies are not included in the following policies: Revised National Youth Policy, Education Sector Plan, Rubber Industry Master Plan, and the National Employment Policy. (45-51)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, 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 with regard to 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-funded program implemented by MOL, which aims to use radio and billboard messages to raise public awareness on human trafficking. (8,32) In 2018, MOL conducted an anti-trafficking public awareness campaign during the country's first World Day Against Trafficking in Persons. (10)
Shelter†	MOGCSP-operated shelter for vulnerable street children that includes a case management system. (6) Active in 2018. (10)
USDOL-Funded Projects to Combat Child Labor	County Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labor (CLEAR) II, implemented by Winrock International and partners Verité and Lawyers Without Borders to build the capacity of the government to address child labor. (2,52,53) Additional information is available on the USDOL website.
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), \$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; and McGovern-Dole International Food For Education and Child Nutrition Program. (54-56) 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. (43) Active in 2018. (10)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)

Program	Description
Liberia Social Safety Nets Project (2017–2021)	\$10 million World Bank-funded 4-year project implemented by MOGCSP that aims to establish key national safety net delivery systems and provide support for low-income households. (57) Active in 2018. (10)

† 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. (58–64)

In the previous year, the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services and the MOL, with support from USAID and UNDP, conducted a 2017 Labor Force Survey, which reportedly includes a child labor component. (6) However, the government did not analyze or release any data in 2018. (10) Although the government funds social programs, they are not sufficient to address child labor, including in domestic work, the production of rubber, and the mining of 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, and the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2013 – 2018
	Ensure that penalties for employing children under the minimum age for work are stringent enough to deter violations.	2014 – 2018
	Raise the compulsory education age to be consistent with the minimum age for employment.	2016 – 2018
Enforcement	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties for child labor violations.	2017 – 2018
	Conduct an adequate number of worksite inspections to combat child labor, including its worst forms.	2017 – 2018
	Publish information on the labor inspectorate's funding and the number of child labor violations found.	2016 – 2018
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted in the informal sector in which research indicates children are working.	2016 – 2018
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate's complaint mechanism is adequately supported and operational.	2017 – 2018
	Ensure adequate funding for child labor enforcement agencies, such as the Ministry of Labor, the Liberia National Police, and the Women and Children Protection Section, and provide necessary training for such officials to enforce child labor laws.	2010 – 2018
	Disaggregate the child endangerment cases prosecuted through the Ministry of Justice to determine the number of child labor violations.	2016 – 2018
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement's investigations conducted, violations found, prosecutions initiated and convictions secured, related to the worst forms of child labor.	2017 – 2018
Coordination	Ensure adequate funding for the National Commission on Child Labor's program activities to address child labor.	2017 – 2018
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into relevant policies.	2010 – 2018
	Renew or develop policies that improve youth literacy rates and improve the health care delivery systems, such as the National Strategy for Child Survival and the National Health Policy.	2015 – 2018
	Publish information about the activities taken to implement policies that address child labor.	2017 – 2018
Social Programs	Collect and publish comprehensive research data to determine child labor activities and to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2018
	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, providing adequate transportation and ensuring that children are registered at birth.	2012 – 2018
	Ensure the practice of "bush schools" does not prematurely remove children from school before the compulsory education age.	2017 – 2018
	Expand existing social programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, especially in domestic work, the production of rubber, and the mining of gold and diamonds.	2009 – 2018

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