

In 2019, Maldives made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the government passed a new Child Rights Protection Act, which takes steps to ensure compliance with international child protection laws and standards. In addition, the National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee met for the first time in more than 2 years. However, although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced labor in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. The government has not determined specific hazardous occupations or activities that are prohibited for children, and the law does not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Moreover, the government does not have a policy or program 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 forced labor in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1,2) 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 (%)		97.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (3)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2009. (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
Services	Domestic work (2,5)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,5)
	Forced labor in domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2)
	Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs (5,6)

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

Information on children's work is limited because a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. Maldivian children from the outer islands are brought to the capital, Malé, for domestic work. (2) Some children from impoverished families may be more vulnerable to sex trafficking. (7) Some of these children are reported to be victims of forced labor and sexual abuse. In addition, some girls from Bangladesh are victims of human trafficking to Maldives for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. (2) There are also some reports of foreign tourists engaging in commercial sexual exploitation of children. (1,2,8)




II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

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



MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

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 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	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Section 6 of the Employment Act (9)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 7 of the Employment Act (9)
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 (9,10)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 12–15 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (10)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 17–19 of the Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (11)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 133(c)(1) of the Drugs Act (12)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children (13)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	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 (13,14)
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 (14,15)

* No conscription (16)

In November 2019, Maldives passed a new Child Rights Protection Act, which came into effect in February 2020. The new Act takes steps to ensure compliance with international child protection laws and standards. (5,17)

The law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as the use, procurement, or offering of a child for pornographic performances is not criminally prohibited. (11)

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) that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Labor Relations Authority, Ministry of Economic Development (MED)	Enforces the Employment Act, including child labor provisions. Conducts labor inspections and issues fines for violations. (6,9)
Family and Child Protection Department, Maldives Police Service (MPS)	Investigates complaints of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Refers cases to the Prosecutor General's Office for prosecution and the Ministry of Gender and Family to provide victim services. (15) Employs eight officers in Malé to investigate child labor cases, including child commercial sexual exploitation and child pornography cases. (15)
Family and Child Protection Services, Ministry of Gender and Family	Receives referrals of children who have been exploited, including in commercial sexual exploitation and drug trafficking, and provides care for such victims. (5,6)
Anti-Human Trafficking Department, MPS	Investigates human trafficking-related offenses and enforces laws prohibiting trafficking in persons, including cases of child trafficking. (5) Employs five officers to investigate human trafficking cases. (15,18)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the LRA that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including labor inspector training for new inspectors.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$547,747 (6)	\$572,984 (5)
Number of Labor Inspectors	17 (6)	15 (5)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (6)	No (5)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	No (6)	No (5)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	356 (6)	230 (5)
Number Conducted at Worksite	356 (6)	230 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (6)	0 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (6)	N/A (5)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (6)	N/A (5)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (6)	No (5)

The number of labor inspectors was reduced from 17 in 2018 to 15 in 2019 due to staff turnover. The LRA received a budget of \$572,984 for 2019, of which \$9,209 was specifically used for labor inspections. (5) However, the LRA reported that the amount of funding was not adequate to cover inspections in outlying islands, which incurs a large travel cost. The LRA also reported that new employees did not receive initial training from the government. (5,6)

In addition, although the labor inspectorate is authorized to assess penalties, no fines were issued in practice due to a lack of coordination between the LRA and the Maldives Inland Revenue Authority, which has the mandate to receive the payment of the fines. (5,6,9) In 2019, the Maldives Police Service (MPS) reported one case in which children were helping their parents work, but found no child labor violations. (6)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, 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 MPS that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including lack of resources for investigators.

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (6)	Yes (5)
Number of Investigations	1 (6)	80 (5)
Number of Violations Found	0 (6)	Unknown (5)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (6)	Unknown (5)
Number of Convictions	0 (6)	Unknown (5)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (6)	Unknown (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (5)

Investigators have insufficient funding and resources, such as office facilities and transportation. (19) Police and other officials also have inadequate training on procedures for identifying human trafficking victims and providing referrals to protective services, including for children. (18) MPS reported that several trainings for investigators during the reporting period touched on the issue of child labor. However, MPS acknowledged that these trainings were not sufficient, as trainings were not designed to specifically address child labor. (5)

The LRA established a reciprocal referral mechanism for victims of human trafficking, in which the LRA informs the MPS via their online portal. MPS investigated 80 incidents of child pornography and commercial sexual exploitation in 2019, including 4 cases of child prostitution. (8) However, the investigations are not disaggregated by types of exploitation related to the worst forms of child labor. It is reported that MPS and social services providers did not have a clear understanding of the differences between sex trafficking and sexual abuse, especially in cases of children; this made the true number of sex trafficking victims unknown. (7) In addition, the outcome of these cases is unknown and the government did not provide information on the total number of prosecutions, convictions, or penalties assessed related to the worst forms of child labor. (5)

Also in 2019, the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services identified six child sex trafficking cases and 15 potential child labor trafficking cases, but did not refer them to the Maldives Police Services' Human Trafficking Unit; it was unclear whether the MPS Family and Child Protection Department investigated the cases on other charges. (7)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee (NAHTSC)	Manages all anti-human trafficking activities and implements the country's Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan. Chaired by Ministry of Defense leadership and consists of 10 participating government agencies. (1,7,10,20) During the reporting period, the NAHTSC held its first meeting in more than 2 years in December 2019. (5)

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 coverage of all forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan (2015–2019)	Established the government's goals to combat human trafficking, including establishing institutions, coordinating activities, raising awareness, and building capacity. (21) The National Action Plan has been updated for 2020–2022. (5)

In February 2020, the government approved the new National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan for 2020-2022, which aims to achieve significant progress on raising human trafficking awareness and increasing support for victims, including child victims of trafficking. (5,22) However, research found no evidence of a policy designed to address other relevant forms of child labor, such as forced labor in domestic work or trafficking drugs.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, 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 to address the problem in all sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Family and Child Service Centers†	Nineteen Ministry of Gender and Family-operated centers that provide psychosocial support for child victims of abuse and exploitation, four of which provide temporary shelter for victims. (19)
National Victim Support Hotline (Number 1696)†	MED-operated hotline dedicated to receiving reports of human trafficking and child labor. Supported by MPS and Maldives Immigration. (23)
Child Helpline (Number 1412)†	Ministry of Gender and Family-operated helpline established with the support of MPS and UNICEF to receive reports of child abuse cases. (19)

† Program is funded by the Government of Maldives.

Research was unable to determine what activities were undertaken during the reporting period to implement existing social programs. (5) 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. (19) 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.

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 – 2019
	Criminally prohibit all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including procuring, offering, and using children for pornographic performances.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2019
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspectors receive training that specifically focuses on child labor issues, including training for new employees and refresher courses.	2009 – 2019
	Establish a referral mechanism between labor authorities and social services.	2016 – 2019
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate receives sufficient resources to enforce child labor laws, including to cover inspections in outlying islands, which incurs a large travel cost.	2017 – 2019
	Ensure sufficient coordination between the labor inspectorate and the Maldives Inland Revenue Authority to ensure fines authorized by the labor inspectorate are collected.	2019
	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 – 2019
	Collect and publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of violations, prosecutions, and convictions for crimes involving the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2019
	Adopt a policy to address all relevant forms of child labor.	2014 – 2019
Social Programs	Conduct and publish a national child labor survey and research on the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children.	2009 – 2019
	Publish information about activities that were undertaken to implement social programs.	2017 – 2019

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Provide sufficient funding, human resources, and staff training for Family and Child Service centers and shelters that serve abused and exploited children.	2018 – 2019
	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 – 2019

REFERENCES

- 1 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. March 7, 2019.
- 2 U.S. Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report- 2019: Maldives. Washington, DC, June 20, 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-trafficking-in-persons-report-2/maldives/>.
- 3 UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Gross intake ratio to the last grade of primary education, both sexes (%). Accessed March 1, 2020. For more information, please see "Children's Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions" in the Reference Materials section of this report. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>.
- 4 ILO. Analysis of Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Statistics from National Household or Child Labor Surveys. Original data from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2009. Analysis received March 2020. Please see the "Children's Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions" in the Reference Materials section of this report.
- 5 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. March 19, 2020.
- 6 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. March 7, 2019.
- 7 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. E-mail communication with USDOL official. June 25, 2020.
- 8 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. February 19, 2020.
- 9 Government of the Maldives. Employment Act (unofficial translation). Enacted: October 13, 2008. http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/85764/96218/F1772069692/MDV85764_English.pdf.
- 10 Government of the Maldives. Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, Law No: 12/2014. Enacted: December 8, 2013. Source on file.
- 11 Government of the Maldives. Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders, Act Number 12/2009. Enacted: 2009. Source on file.
- 12 Government of the Maldives. Drugs Act. Enacted: 1991. <http://www.drugcourt.gov.mv/documents/laws/17-2011-Drug-Act-Translation.pdf>.
- 13 Government of the Maldives. Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children, Law No. 9/91. Source on file.
- 14 Government of the Maldives. Constitution of the Republic of Maldives. Enacted: 2008. <http://www.maldivesinfo.gov.mv/home/upload/downloads/Compilation.pdf>.
- 15 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. January 9, 2017.
- 16 CIA. The World Factbook. Accessed June 24, 2019. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mv.html>.
- 17 Government of Maldives. Press Release: Bill to Reconstitute Child Rights Protection Act Submitted to Parliament. August 18, 2019. <https://presidency.gov.mv/Press/Article/21813>.
- 18 U.S. Department of State. Trafficking in Persons Report- 2018: Maldives. Washington, DC, June 28, 2018. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-trafficking-in-persons-report/maldives/>.
- 19 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. January 12, 2018.
- 20 U.S. Embassy- Colombo. Reporting. April 2, 2020.
- 21 Government of Maldives. Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan 2015–2019. Source on file.
- 22 Government of the Maldives. Maldives National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan 2020-2022. February 25, 2020. Source on file.
- 23 Ministry of Economic Development. Labour and Migration. Republic of Maldives. March 2016. <http://www.trade.gov.mv/dms/199/1460879386.pdf>.