

In 2012, Bahrain made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In March 2012, Bahrain ratified ILO Convention 138 and passed a new labor law that increased the minimum age for work from 14 to 15. The current minimum age for hazardous work is 16, which is below the age of 18 recommended in international standards. Although there do not appear to be widespread incidents of the worst forms of child labor, gaps remain in the legal framework regarding hazardous work and domestic service. These gaps may place children at greater risk of entering exploitative work. Children continue to engage in the worst forms of child labor, particularly in domestic service.

Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Attending School	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate		Unavailable

Sources:

Primary completion rate: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2013.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the problem is widespread, some children in Bahrain are engaged in the worst forms of child labor.(3) Children are engaged in domestic service in Bahrain, some as a result of trafficking.(3, 4) Children employed as domestics may be required to work long hours, performing strenuous tasks, without sufficient food or shelter. These children may be isolated in private homes and are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(5) Children are also occasionally victims of commercial sexual exploitation, in some cases through trafficking.(4, 6, 7) There are reports of children working on the streets, but specific information on hazards is unknown.(8)



Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Law sets the minimum age for work at age 15 and the minimum age for hazardous work at age 16.(9, 10) In March 2012, Bahrain ratified ILO Convention 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment.(7) Children ages 14 to 16 must obtain authorization to work from the Ministry of Labor (MOL) and must complete a medical examination prior to employment.(10) The Government has stated that, in practice, work permits are only issued for children under age 15 in cases of apprenticeships and for work during summer holidays.(8) In addition, all workers must be registered with the Social Insurance Organization, which does not accept registrations for children under age 18. This requirement is designed to encourage a minimum age for work of 18 in practice.(11)

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International Conventions and Selected Laws on Child Labor and Education

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓
	Minimum Age for Work	15
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	16
	Compulsory Education Age	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

Minors working in enterprises that employ only family members are exempt from the Labor Law.(10) The exemption on the minimum age for work for children working with their families may expose children working in family businesses to hazardous situations.

The Labor Law prohibits night work and places restrictions on how many hours of work a minor can perform.(10) Ministerial Order No. 6 outlines a list of 25 types of hazardous work that minors under age 16 are prohibited from performing.(12) The Government has considered changes to the Labor Law to increase the minimum age for hazardous work from age 16 to age 18.(12, 13) However, the current legal minimum age for hazardous work is under the age recommended in international standards.(12)

The Government has issued Ministerial Orders requiring employers to maintain employment contracts for any domestic workers.(14, 15) In July 2012, the Government passed a new private sector labor law that extends some

provisions, such as annual leave, to domestic workers. However, the new labor law does not extend other provisions to domestic workers, including an employee's right to leave his employer.(4, 16) This restriction may increase domestic servants' vulnerability to forced labor.

The Vagrancy Act of 2007 prohibits adults from inciting children to beg.(8) The Constitution prohibits compulsory labor except in very specific cases such as national emergencies.(17) The minimum age for voluntary military service is 18, and there is no conscription.(18) The 2008 Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons prohibits all forms of trafficking for the purposes of forced labor, slavery, prostitution, or any other form of commercial sexual exploitation.(19, 20) The Penal Code prohibits inciting a child to engage in "immorality," which has been interpreted to cover pornography.(21, 22) It also prohibits operating a brothel or using the services of a child prostitute.(21) The Penal Code further states that any person who relies on prostitution or immorality for his or her livelihood will be punished with imprisonment. While penalizing adults who profit from child prostitution and pornography, this prohibition, in theory, may enable the prosecution of children for involvement in such activities.(21, 22)

The Constitution mandates free and compulsory basic education.(17) Education is compulsory to age 15 and free to grade 12.(8, 13) The Government may impose fines on parents or guardians in cases of truancy.(8, 23)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The Government of Bahrain has a National Committee on Childhood to protect children's rights under the authority of the Ministry of Human Rights and Social Development (MOHRSD). The Committee serves to promote the educational, social, cultural, and psychological development of children.(8) The Government has established agencies to address trafficking. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs heads a committee to coordinate trafficking policies.(24)

However, research found no evidence of a government agency or other body tasked with coordinating government efforts to combat child labor specifically.

The MOL and the Labor Market Regulatory Authority have responsibilities for enforcing child labor laws. These agencies have systems in place for sharing information on child labor cases, including systems for referring cases to the judiciary when warranted.(7) MOL inspectors enforce child labor laws.(4) Some inspectors from the Labor Market Regulatory Authority also perform inspections, particularly concerning foreigners' work permits and working situations.(25) There are 24 MOL labor inspectors who investigate labor law violations, including violations of child labor laws.(4, 26) Labor inspectors have been trained on international child labor standards by the ILO.(7, 26) However, no information is available on inspections to enforce child labor laws during the reporting period.(7, 26)

The Ministry of the Interior is the lead agency responsible for enforcing criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor, including those against trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Ministry coordinates actions with the MOHRSD and the Public Prosecutor, as needed.(7) These agencies have processes in place for sharing information on such cases. The Ministry of the Interior's Criminal Investigation Directorate oversees a 12-person unit that investigates potential cases of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.(7) Although the Government conducted investigations into cases of prostitution during the reporting period, no information is available on the number of investigations or convictions involving minors in commercial sexual exploitation or trafficking.(7, 26)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government has stated that the worst forms of child labor are not a significant problem in the country, and therefore, it has not allocated resources to develop

a national action plan to combat child labor.(26, 27) The Labor Market Regulatory Authority has conducted research on migrant workers in the country.(20) Some migrant workers are involved in domestic service, and domestic servants are particularly vulnerable to labor abuses due to gaps in the legal framework.(4) There is no evidence, however, that the Government has conducted or participated in specific research to determine to what extent children are engaged in the worst forms of child labor.(7)

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government funds an NGO-run shelter, Dar Al Aman, which provides services for victims of trafficking, labor exploitation, and commercial sexual exploitation, including children.(20, 22) The shelter provides legal, medical, and psychological services.(24) The Government also supports the Bahrain Child Protection Center, which provides treatment and counseling to victims of sexual exploitation. Under the Vagrancy Act, the MOHRSD established the Social Welfare Dignity Home, which provides services to homeless persons and beggars, including children.(8) The MOHRSD operates a toll-free hotline to report suspected child labor cases.(7, 26) However, the hotline has primarily been used as a political tool for reporting suspected cases of participation by children in anti-Government demonstrations.(26)

The Government participates in a USDOS-funded program to combat trafficking that aims to build the capacity of government and other officials.(22, 28, 29) Despite the programs described here, research found no evidence of outreach programs specifically aimed at protecting the rights of children involved in domestic service.

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Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Bahrain:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Enact revisions to the Labor Law: (1) to increase the minimum age for hazardous work to align with international standards and (2) to abolish requirements that domestic workers have their employers' permission to change jobs.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
Laws and Regulations	Ensure there are protections against hazardous work for children in family businesses.	2012
	Ensure that children are not included under the Penal Code provision that requires any person who relies on prostitution or immorality for his or her livelihood to be punished with imprisonment.	2010, 2011, 2012
Coordination and Enforcement	Establish a mechanism to coordinate government efforts to combat child labor.	2009, 2011, 2012
	Make data on child labor law enforcement publicly available.	2009, 2011, 2012
Policies	Conduct research to determine the scope of children's involvement in the worst forms of child labor in Bahrain.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Develop a national plan of action to address the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic service and commercial sexual exploitation.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
Social Programs	Develop outreach programs to protect the rights of children involved in domestic service.	2010, 2011, 2012

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