

In 2014, Benin made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government adopted the National Policy for Child Protection and the Action Plan to Eradicate Child Exploitation in major national markets. The Government also increased the capacity of the Office for the Protection of Minors by extending its child protection services to 12 geographical departments of Benin where they did not previously exist. The Government continued to operate social advancement centers that provide social and reintegration services to children withdrawn from child trafficking and labor. However, children in Benin are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture, and particularly in the production of cotton, and in the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work. Limited resources for the systematic enforcement of child labor laws impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. The national action plan pertaining to the worst forms of child labor remains unfunded and social programs to combat child labor are insufficient to adequately address the extent of the problem.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Benin are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture, and particularly in the production of cotton.(1, 2) Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work.(3, 4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Benin.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	7-14 yrs.	20.9 (680,004)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	71.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	16.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		70.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2012, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(5)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2011-2012.(6)

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 cotton† and cashew nuts*† (2, 7-9)
	Capturing,* cleaning,* and descaling fish*† (1, 9-12)
	Raising livestock*† (11, 13)
Industry	Collecting,*† crushing,*† washing,*† and sieving stones*† for gold mining*† and gravel*† and granite quarrying† (1, 2, 13-16)
	Construction, including brick-making*† (1, 2, 12, 17)
Services	Domestic work† (1, 2, 4, 13, 17-21)
	Working as mechanics*† and in the transportation industry*† (1, 9, 14, 15, 20)
	Street vending,*† including gasoline* (1, 2, 9, 14)
	Dressmaking*† and carpentry*† (1, 11)
	Begging* (1, 2, 17)

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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†	Forced labor in domestic work, construction,* mining,* granite quarrying, and agriculture,* including in the production of cotton, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (1, 2, 4, 13, 16-19, 22-26)
	Forced begging by Koranic teachers* (2-4, 27, 28)
	Forced labor in fishing* (1, 9)
	Commercial sexual exploitation* sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (2-4, 13, 17)

* Evidence of this activity is limited and/or the extent of the problem is unknown.

† 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.

An ILO-IPEC study found 2,553 children working in 102 surveyed mines and quarries across Benin.(16) Children who work in quarries are subject to long working hours and to physical injuries and illnesses from dynamite explosions, falling rocks, collapsing quarry walls, and dust inhalation.(14, 16, 29) A UNICEF study of three markets in Benin revealed more than 7,800 children working in the markets, mainly as street vendors.(17, 30) Children working in markets are exposed to injuries and sexual and physical abuse.(30)

Through the system of *vidomegon*, girls as young as age 7 are sent to relatives or strangers to work as domestic workers in exchange for food, housing, and schooling. In practice, some of these girls receive care and an education, while many become domestic workers and are victims of labor exploitation and sexual abuse.(2, 17-19) In Northern Benin, some boys, placed in the care of Koranic teachers for the purpose of education, are forced by their teachers to beg on the street or to work in fields; they must then surrender the money they have earned to their teachers.(2, 17, 27, 28)




Benin is also a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked children. Children are trafficked within Benin and in West and Central Africa for the purposes of domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and to work in agriculture and stone quarries.(2, 18, 23, 24, 26) Research shows that these children endure sexual and physical abuse; malnourishment; and, in some cases, death.(1)

Although the Constitution guarantees free compulsory primary education by law, in practice, some parents are expected to pay school fees for registration, uniforms, books, and materials.(1, 3, 18, 31) These expenses may deter families from sending their children to school and may increase the risk of children engaging in child labor or of becoming victims of human trafficking.(17) Many children in Benin, particularly in rural areas, are not registered at birth. Unable to prove their citizenship, unregistered children may have difficulty accessing services such as education.(1, 17) In addition, evidence suggests that incidences of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, including corporal punishment and the rape of students by teachers, prevent some children from remaining in school.(1, 17, 32)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Benin 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	✓
 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, including its worst forms (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Article 166 of the Labor Code (33)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of the Hazardous Occupation List 2011-29 (34)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Hazardous Occupation List 2011-29 (34)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors 2006-04 (35)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 6 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors 2006-04 (35)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3 of the Law on the Prevention and Repression of Violence Against Women and Children 2011-26; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors 2006-04 (35, 36)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors 2006-04 (15, 35)
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 06 of Law 2005-43 of June 26, 2006 (37)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Article 06 of Law 2005-43 of June 26, 2006 (37)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	11	Article 24 of Act No. 2003-17 of November 11, 2003 (38)
Free Public Education	Yes	Progressively Free*	Article 13 of the Constitution (39)

* Progressive introduction of free education over a period of time.

Beninese law is not completely consistent with international standards regarding child labor. Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (2006-04) prohibits the use of children in pornography; however, the sale or possession of child pornography is not prohibited.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Also, article 22 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (2006-2014) prescribes penalties, six months to two years' imprisonment, or fines for human trafficking crimes involving labor exploitation; these punishments are neither sufficiently stringent nor commensurate with the punishments prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.^(2, 35)

Benin's Child Code is a compilation of existing legislation related to children's rights, education, protection, labor, and health. The Child Code's second volume, which contains a bill on child protection and amendments pertaining to offenses involving minors, has been pending adoption by the National Assembly since 2009.^(17, 41) A revised Labor Code, which proposes to increase the penalties for child labor violations and to increase the minimum age of employment to age 15, has been developed but was not approved during the reporting period.⁽¹⁵⁾

Beninese children are only required to attend 6 years of primary school, through age 11.⁽⁴²⁾ Since the minimum age for children to work is 14, children ages 12 to 13 are particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor, as they may have completed primary school but are not legally permitted to work.

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (MOLCS)	Enforce labor laws and investigate Labor Code infractions, including those related to child labor, in the formal sector.(1, 43)
The Ministry of Interior's Central Office for the Protection of Minors (OCPM), under the Criminal Police Department	Enforce laws related to the protection of minors, including the worst forms of child labor.(2, 17, 43)
Ministry of Family, Social Affairs, and National Solidarity (MFSN)	Provide support to victims of child labor and human trafficking.(17) Within MFSN, the Directorate of the Family, Children and Adolescence, is tasked with implementing assistance and social reinsertion programs for children in difficult situations.(2, 17)

Law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2014, the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (MOLCS) employed 15 labor administrators, 4 labor controllers, and 75 labor officers, 56 of whom are labor inspectors. These personnel are employed in 12 departments across Benin to ensure the application of labor laws, including those on child labor.(12) Given the prevalence of child labor in the country, the number of labor inspectors is inadequate. In August 2014, the National School of Administration and Magistrates updated the training curriculum for labor inspectors to bring it into compliance with international standards, including standards related to child labor.(41) Also, MOLCS inspectors, in conjunction with the ILO-IPEC, organized training workshops for government officials, labor unions, and other civil society groups on hazardous child labor.(44) Research did not reveal information about the number, type, and quality of labor inspections and child labor law violations found. Labor inspectors can impose sanctions and order payment for violations, which can be given to victims as compensation.(15) The Government refers children identified during labor inspections to shelters run by national and international organizations.(15) Research indicates that the labor inspectorate lacks adequate staff, material, and financial resources to effectively carry out inspections.(2) Moreover, the ILO CEACR notes that Benin's labor inspectors have conducted a steadily decreasing number of workplace inspections due to these inadequacies.(15, 45) In addition, UNICEF reports that child rights laws, including child labor laws, are often not enforced.(46)

Criminal Law Enforcement

During 2014, the Government of Benin extended the Ministry of Interior's Central Office for the Protection of Minors (OCPM)'s child protection services to 12 geographical departments where they did not previously exist. The effort consists of creating additional local offices throughout the country and training police with regard to child abuse.(2, 41) During the reporting period, OCPM trained all 15 agents on child trafficking.(44, 47) OCPM investigated four child labor violations and reported 102 cases of child trafficking. OCPM also referred 19 suspected traffickers to court for child trafficking and labor charges.(48) The hotlines operated by OCPM function exclusively in Cotonou, which makes reporting cases involving child exploitation more difficult in rural areas, where hotlines are nonexistent. The number of calls related to child labor during 2014 is unknown.(17)

During 2014, OCPM worked with the Ministry of Family, Social Affairs, and National Solidarity (MFSN) to rescue and provide temporary shelter and reintegration services to 220 victims of human trafficking, including four victims of exploitative child labor.(2, 48) Shelters also provided legal, medical, and psychological services to child trafficking victims, including foreign child trafficking victims, before repatriating them to their home countries.(49) OCPM and MFSN held sessions to raise awareness of child trafficking laws in communities where human trafficking is prevalent.(2) Despite these efforts, OCPM remained understaffed, underfunded, and without adequate office supplies, transportation, and fuel to enforce laws effectively and provide victims with immediate assistance.(2, 17)

Research also did not uncover information about the number of prosecutions and convictions, or on whether appropriate penalties were applied related to the criminal enforcement of laws related to the worst forms of child labor. Local judges are not trained on child protection issues, nor are they sufficiently aware of international standards regarding the worst forms of child labor.(17)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (CDN)	Elaborate policies; approve programs; and coordinate, monitor, and evaluate efforts to combat child labor in Benin.(17) Led by the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service. Comprises delegates from multiple Beninese ministries, UNICEF, ILO, trade unions, and NGOs.(15)
National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection (CNSCPE)	Implement, coordinate, and monitor government efforts on child protection. Chaired by MFSN and comprises five technical committees, including committees for human trafficking and labor exploitation.(15, 50) Each committee has an action plan and proposes activities to the CNSCPE.(43) Meets on a quarterly basis and includes 40 members from sector-based ministries, NGO networks, international technical and financial partners, and bilateral partners.(40, 43)
Departmental Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection (CDSCPE)	Coordinate, monitor, and evaluate efforts on child protection at the departmental level. Comprises six departmental committees that identify child protection activities, and compile and analyze the data gathered to report it to the CNSCPE.(12, 44)
National Commission on Children's Rights	Coordinate and promote efforts on children's rights at the national level. Chaired by the Ministry of Justice and comprises delegates from multiple other ministries and representatives of civil society groups appointed by the Minister of Justice.(17)

In 2014, the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (CDN) met regularly to coordinate and evaluate existing child labor programs in Benin. The National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection (CNSCPE) met twice during the year to monitor government efforts on child protection.(41) Research did not determine whether the Departmental Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection (CDSCPE) and the National Commission on Children's Rights were active during the reporting period. A 2014 UN Human Rights Council report noted that the overlapping mandates for the CDN, CNSCPE, CDSCPE, and the National Commission on Children's Rights are a source of confusion. The lack of clarity among national coordination mechanisms affects work on the ground, as a multitude of committees and local commissions are made up of the same employees.(17, 46) In addition, although there is an information management system at the national level, data are rarely analyzed or used to affect implementation on the ground.(46)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Benin has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 7).

Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Benin (NAP) (2012-2015)	Aims to improve child labor by conducting awareness-raising campaigns; increasing access to education and training; reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities through livelihood strategies; increasing enforcement efforts; strengthening protection and monitoring measures for victims of exploitive child labor; and harmonizing the legal sector by ensuring that judges, police officers, and labor inspectors have access to and understand pertinent laws related to child labor.(3) The Government publicized and disseminated the NAP and began work under the NAP to harmonize legislation related to the worst forms of child labor.(15, 51) The Ministries of Labor, Justice, and Family and National Solidarity conduct activities under the NAP that are also included in each Ministry's 2014 activity plans.(15, 51)
National Policy for Child Protection (2014-2025)†	Aims to improve child protection in Benin. Includes components to improve school feeding programs and to combat the worst forms of child labor, with a focus on child trafficking. MFSN is responsible for implementing this policy.(41, 52)
Education Sector Action Plan (2006-2015)*	Aims to reduce poverty and improve access to primary education, especially for girls.(50)
Action Plan to Eradicate Child Exploitation in Markets†	Aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the major markets of Benin, including Dantokpa in Cotonou, Ouando in Porto-Novo, and Arzèkè in Parakou. Will strengthen child labor laws, raise awareness of child labor in markets, and create social programs for children rescued from labor exploitation in the targeted markets.(41, 53)

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Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor (cont)

Policy	Description
Benin and Nigeria Joint Committee to Combat Child Trafficking	Aims to reinforce border security measures and repatriate victims of human trafficking between Benin and Nigeria.(54, 55) Child victims are not repatriated unless a safe reinsertion program—such as schooling, vocational training, or an apprenticeship—has been arranged in advance.(49, 56)
Anti-Trafficking Accord Between the Republic of Benin and the Republic of the Congo	Targets the identification, prevention, and rehabilitation of cross-border trafficked children between Benin and the Republic of the Congo. Includes components for monitoring and evaluation, and for conducting cross-border investigations.(49, 57, 58)
Bipartite Declaration to Combat Child Labor Between the Government of Benin and the Beninese Worker Associations	Pledges to promote efforts to reduce the worst forms of child labor and to collaborate at all levels with all parties concerned to combat child labor.(59)
PRSP (2011 -2015)*	Aims to improve free universal primary education, education quality, student retention rates, provision of social services, and vocational training and microfinance for youth and women.(54)

* Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Despite efforts, the National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Benin remains unfunded.(41)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2014, the Government of Benin funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms. The Government has other programs that may have an impact on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
MFSN Social Promotion Centers‡	Provides social services to children, including child laborers; has nationwide coverage but vary in functionality.(15, 17, 46)
OCPM Transit Facility‡	Used as interim care facility for human trafficking survivors prior to their placement in a long-term shelter. Has the capacity to house 160 children (80 boys and 80 girls).(15, 56)
Awareness-raising campaigns‡	Government-implemented nationwide human trafficking and child labor awareness campaigns.(41, 43)
Ministry of Mines' Social Services*‡	Provides business management training to 125 families, particularly women, involved in mining and quarrying; also provides protection equipment, including boots and gloves, to mining craftsman in three cities.(15, 41)
Vocational School Program for Survivors of Child Trafficking‡	MFSN program, implemented in coordination with UNICEF. Maintains a vocational school program to train survivors of child trafficking in a trade.(15, 49)
Anti-Child Trafficking Legislation Publication‡	Ministry of Justice and Family training sessions on child trafficking laws to help educate the general population.(41, 49)
Eliminating the Worst Forms of Child Labor in West Africa and Strengthening Sub-Regional Cooperation through ECOWAS I and II	USDOL-funded regional project that supported ECOWAS to strengthen its role in combating the worst forms of child labor in the West Africa sub-region by providing policy and capacity-building support for all ECOWAS states.(60, 61) By the end of 2014, the project withdrew or prevented 1,507 children from the worst forms of child labor in mining and quarrying in Benin. Also provided educational services to 1,754 children and livelihood services to 1,125 families in Benin.(62)
Strengthening Social Dialogue as an Effective Tool to Address the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2012-2015)	Government of Ireland-funded, 3-year, \$760,883 project to combat child labor through social dialogue.(63)
Community Teacher Professional Training Program*	\$4.3 million, USAID-funded, 4-year project. Trains approximately 10,000 unlicensed teachers to enhance their competence so they can pass the teacher certification exam.(64)
Girls Education and Community Participation Project*	\$6.9 million, USAID-funded, 6-year project. Increases girls' access to education and improves community participation in school management.(64)
Second Chance Schools*	\$3.5 million, USAID-funded, 4-year project. Promotes alternative approaches to basic education, providing out-of-school children with basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills.(64, 65)

* The impact of this program on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Benin.

Although the Government of Benin has implemented programs to protect children from human trafficking and participated in programs focused on child labor in quarrying and mining, research found no evidence that it has carried out programs to assist children engaged in other worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, or agriculture.

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Benin (Table 9).

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure laws prohibit the sale and possession of child pornography.	2010 – 2014
	Create meaningful penalties for human trafficking crimes involving labor exploitation.	2014
	Adopt the second volume of the Child Code to bring additional protection for children into force.	2009 – 2014
	Raise the compulsory education age to be equivalent to the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2014
	Adopt the draft Labor Code to increase penalties for child labor violations and to increase the minimum age of employment from 14 to 15 years of age.	2013 – 2014
Enforcement	Provide recurrent training on the worst forms of child labor to judiciary officials.	2013 – 2014
	Collect and make public information on the number, type, and quality of labor inspections; law violations; and penalties assessed related to child labor.	2009 – 2014
	Increase the resources and number of labor inspectors and criminal investigators responsible for enforcing laws related to child labor in order to provide adequate coverage of the workforce and provide immediate victim assistance.	2009 – 2014
	Make publicly available information on the number of criminal agents, prosecutions, and convictions and penalties assessed related to the worst forms of child labor	2009 – 2014
	Ensure offenders of laws related to the worst forms of child labor are appropriately penalized according to the law.	2010 – 2014
	Expand hotlines operated by OCPM to facilitate the reporting of child exploitation cases in areas beyond Cotonou, and make public the numbers of calls related to child labor.	2014
	Coordination	Ensure the CDSCPE and the National Commission on Children's Rights actively carry out responsibilities related to the worst forms of child labor.
	Take measures to coordinate efforts at the national level in order to eliminate duplicative activities, committees, and actors at the local level.	2013 – 2014
	Analyze the data received from national information management systems and disseminate results nationwide.	2013 – 2014
Government Policies	Fund and implement the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Benin.	2010 – 2014
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into existing policies.	2010 – 2014
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children working in the production of fish and construction, to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2014
	Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and agriculture, and monitor the progress of these programs.	2010 – 2014

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Take measures to ensure children's safety in schools and prioritize resources to improve access to education by building additional schools, subsidizing or defraying the cost of schools, and providing access to free quality education for all children.	2010 – 2014
	Implement birth registration campaigns to increase children's access to education, especially in rural areas.	2010 – 2014
	Assess the impact that existing social programs may have on addressing child labor.	2011 – 2014

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