

*In 2016, Iraq made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Iraq is receiving this assessment because it implemented a practice that delayed advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor, which facilitated the recruitment of child soldiers. Armed groups engaged in combat against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, including units of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), recruited and used children, some of whom were as young as 12 years old. Several PMF units also received financial and material support from the Iraqi Government, and a February 2016 order from the Iraqi Prime Minister declared the PMF to be formally affiliated with Iraqi security services. In addition, in December 2016, the Iraqi Prime Minister signed a law that formalized the status of the Popular Mobilization Commission, an umbrella organization for the PMF, as a component of the Iraqi security services. Otherwise, the Government conducted targeted labor inspections in areas where child labor was prevalent, established investigative courts on human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in the Kurdistan Region, and improved coordination with the Kurdistan Regional Government through the Central Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons. Children in Iraq also engage in other worst forms of child labor, including forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Limited funding, transportation, and fuel hampered the inspectorate's capacity to enforce child labor laws and criminal law enforcement information remains unavailable. The Government continues to lack programs that focus on assisting children in the worst forms of child labor, particularly those used by armed groups.*



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Iraq engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in armed conflict and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking.(1-7) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Iraq.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	5.3 (454,330)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	75.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		66.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2007, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(8)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4, 2011.(9)

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	Working on farms (6, 10, 11)
	Herding livestock (10, 11)
	Fishing, activities unknown (10)
Industry	Making bricks (6, 12-15)
	Working in factories, including glass, household cleaners, paint, steel, and plastic recycling factories (6, 12, 13, 16)
	Working in carpentry workshops (11, 17)

**Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)**

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Street work, including selling goods, pushing carts, cleaning cars, shining shoes, and begging (6, 10, 13, 15, 16, 18)
	Working at gas stations and auto repair shops (6, 10, 14, 19-21)
	Working in landfills, collecting and scavenging garbage (6, 10, 13-16)
	Domestic work (10, 11)
	Working in hotels, restaurants, and cafes (11, 21)
	Working at cemeteries, including digging graves and selling items (15, 22)
	Voluntarily recruited children used in hostilities by state armed groups (1, 3, 4, 23, 24)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (1, 2, 4-7, 25)
	Forced recruitment of children by state armed groups for use in armed conflict (6, 25)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking, as a result of human trafficking (6, 26)
	Domestic work as a result of human trafficking (1, 27)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 6, 28, 29)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 6, 13, 15, 27, 30, 31)

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

NGOs, an international organization, and the media reported that factions of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) recruited and used children under the age of 18 in operations in Fallujah and other areas of the country, while PMF-affiliated media continued to celebrate the service and sacrifice of child soldiers.(1, 6, 24, 32) In 2016, some PMF units received financial and material support from the Iraqi Government, and a February 2016 order from the Iraqi Prime Minister declared the PMF to be formally affiliated with Iraqi security services. In December 2016, the Iraqi Prime Minister signed a law that formalized the status of the Popular Mobilization Commission, an umbrella organization for the PMF, as a component of the Iraqi security services.(32) Human Rights Watch reported that the PMF was threatening some displaced families in camps and exploiting their need for humanitarian assistance as part of its child recruitment efforts.(6) However, research did not find evidence that the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police used children in armed conflict.(6)

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as ISIL) recruited children and used them in combat operations, including as informants, suicide bombers, and in manning checkpoints.(2, 5, 6, 25) Armed groups engaged in combat against ISIS also recruited and used children.(4, 6, 7, 25) Sunni tribal forces and other armed groups, including the Iran-backed militias, the Women’s Protection Units (YPJ), the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), People’s Defense Forces (HPG), and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) accepted child volunteers into their ranks.(4, 6, 7) In addition to voluntary recruitment, the PKK and YBS forcibly recruited and used Kurdish and Yezidi boys and girls, some as young as 12 years old, in combat and support roles in northern Iraq.(32)




Throughout the country, some girls were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation by their families, who sought financial gain through temporary marriages.(1) This practice involves a dowry paid to the girl’s family and an agreement to dissolve the marriage after a predetermined length of time.(33) ISIS fighters subjected girls, primarily from the Yezidi community, but also from other ethnic and religious groups, to commercial sexual exploitation, forced marriages, or forced domestic work in Iraq and Syria.(1, 28, 34-37) Limited evidence points to trafficking of girls from Iran into the Iraqi Kurdistan Region for commercial sexual exploitation. Some officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were involved in the trafficking of Syrian refugee girls for commercial sexual exploitation.(1, 6, 7, 29, 38)

Children faced barriers accessing education, partially because of attacks on schools, including the targeting of teachers and school personnel, lack of schools nearby, and the use of schools as shelters by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and as detention centers by ISIS.(15, 27, 39, 40) As of September 2016, approximately 35 percent of Iraqi children, including IDP children, were out of school.(41) In addition, out of approximately 61,000 Syrian refugee children, about 40 percent remained out of school.(42) For these refugees, the majority of whom live in the Kurdistan Region, access to education was limited because of security concerns, school-related costs – such as transportation and uniforms – and language issues, because most classes in the Kurdistan Region are taught in Kurdish rather than Arabic.(43)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Iraq 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). However, gaps exist in Iraq's legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Related Entity	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Iraq	Yes	15	Article 7 of the 2015 Labor Law (44)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes	15	Article 90.1 of the 1987 Labor Law (45)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Iraq	Yes	18	Article 95 of the 2015 Labor Law (44)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes	18	Articles 90.2 and 91.1 of the 1987 Labor Law (45)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Iraq	Yes		Articles 95 and 98 of the 2015 Labor Law; Ministry of Labor's Instruction 19 of 1987 (44, 46)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Article 91.2 of the 1987 Labor Law; Ministry of Labor's Instruction 19 of 1987 (45, 46)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Iraq	Yes		Article 9 of the 2015 Labor Law; Articles 1 and 6 of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking (44, 47)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Articles 91.3(a), 91.4 and 97 of the Labor Law (45)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Iraq	No		Articles 1 and 6 of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking (47)
	Kurdistan Region	No		Articles 91.3(a), 91.4 and 97 of the 1987 Labor Law (45)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Iraq	Yes		Articles 399 and 403 of the Penal Code (48)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Articles 91.3(b), 91.4 and 97 of the 1987 Labor Law (45)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Iraq	No		
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Articles 91.3(c), 91.4 and 97 of the Labor Law (45)
Minimum Age for Military Recruitment				
State Compulsory	Iraq and Kurdistan Region	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Iraq and Kurdistan Region	Yes	18	Section 6(2) of the CPA Order 22 (49)
Non-state Compulsory	Iraq and Kurdistan Region	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Iraq	No	12 <sup>‡</sup>	Articles 8.1.1 and 11.1 of the Education Law; Article 1.3 of the Law on Compulsory Education (50, 51)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes	15	Articles 6 and 10 of the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Education Law (52)

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

Standard	Related Entity	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Free Public Education	Iraq	Yes		Article 34.2 of the Constitution; Article 9 of the Education Law (50, 53)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Article 10 of the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Education Law (52)

\* No conscription (49)

‡ Age calculated based on available information.

The provision protecting children from hazardous work does not apply to children age 15-17 working in family businesses under the authority of family members.(44)

Also, in Iraq, Article 1 of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking requires force or coercion to be present as an element of the crime of child trafficking, which is inconsistent with Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol.(47) The KRG must endorse laws passed by the Government of Iraq after 1991 for such laws to enter into force in the Kurdistan Region, which comprises the provinces of Dahuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah.(28, 54) The KRG has not endorsed the Iraq Law to Combat Human Trafficking, and the only law in effect in the Kurdistan region prohibiting trafficking, the 1987 Labor Law, merely mentions child trafficking and does not prohibit the necessary elements of a child trafficking standard.(52, 55)

Under Articles 8 and 11 of the Iraqi Education Law and the Law on Compulsory Education, children are required to attend primary school for 6 years, which is typically up to age 12.(50, 51, 56) This standard makes children ages 12 to 15 particularly vulnerable to child labor, because they are not required to be in school, yet they are not legally permitted to work.

On December 29, 2016, the Council of Ministers directed the Ministry of Justice to draft an amendment to the Education Law that would extend compulsory education through secondary school.(57)

In 2016, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs discussed a draft child protection law that includes provisions on child labor. No further information was available.(6)

### 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). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA)	Enforce child labor laws and regulations through its Child Labor Unit. Conduct research on child labor through its Childhood Welfare Authority.(19) Receive complaints of child labor cases.(6)
Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs	Enforce child labor laws and regulations in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. KRG Ministry of Interior's police units play a supporting role in the daily activities of the Ministry.(19)
Ministry of Interior	Enforce criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor. Collaborate with MOLSA, the Iraqi Industries Federation, and the Confederation of Trade Unions to conduct inspection campaigns.(19) Maintain a hotline for victims of human trafficking that is routed directly to the Ministry's Anti-Trafficking Department.(19)
KRG Ministry of Interior	Investigate cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking.(6)

#### *Labor Law Enforcement*

In 2016, law enforcement agencies in Iraq took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown	Unknown* (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	120 (19)	120 (6)
Number of Child Labor Dedicated Inspectors	Unknown	6 (6)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (19)	No (44)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown (19)	Yes (57)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown (19)	Unknown (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (19)	No (57)
Number of Labor Inspections	21,794 <sup>‡</sup> (19)	Unknown (58)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown	1,076 (57)
Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown	Unknown (58)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	60 <sup>‡</sup> (19)	325 (57)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown	229 (57)
Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (19)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown	Yes (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (45)	Yes (44)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (19)	Unknown* (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Unknown (36)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	Unknown (6)

\* The Government does not publish this information.

‡ Data are from January 1, 2015 to November 30, 2015.

In 2016, research did not find information about the funding of MOLSA. However, previously officials had stated that their funding was limited.(19) In 2015, insufficient transportation and fuel hampered MOLSA's capacity to enforce child labor laws.(19) The number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Iraq's workforce, which includes over 8.9 million workers.(59) According to the ILO's recommendation of 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in industrializing economies, Iraq should employ roughly 593 labor inspectors.(19, 60, 61) In 2016, labor inspections resulted in 325 cases being referred to the Labor Court for prosecution. The Labor Court fined 229 employers and closed down 10 factories that were repeated violators of child labor laws.(57) Jointly with the Ministry of Education, MOLSA conducted a targeted outreach campaign to vulnerable communities and inspected areas where child labor was prevalent. The joint campaigns resulted in 257 children returning to school.(57) These visits were in addition to the aforementioned 1,076 official inspections.(57) The 2015 inspection data were collected by the High Commission on Human Rights. In 2016, with the dissolution of this Commission and the Ministry of Human Rights, data collection on a central level was no longer carried out.(57)

In 2016, the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs did not have budgetary allocations for inspections, did not provide child labor training to inspectors, and did not carry out inspections.(6) However, the KRG established investigative sub-committees and investigative courts focused on trafficking in persons and commercial sexual exploitation in the Kurdistan Region.(25)

### ***Criminal Law Enforcement***

Research did not find information on whether criminal law enforcement agencies in Iraq took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown (19)	Unknown (6)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (19)	Unknown (6)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (29)	Unknown (6)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	Unknown (6)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (19)	Unknown (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (19)	Unknown (6)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (19)	Unknown (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown	No (18)

In 2016, the Government conducted 314 investigations of human trafficking cases and 17 prosecutions. It is unknown how many of these cases may have involved child victims.(32) The KRG did not provide training for criminal investigators. KRG officials stated that courts could refer cases of the worst forms of child labor to the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.(6) Research did not discover other information on criminal law enforcement, including in the Kurdistan Region.

Child victims of human trafficking and forced labor faced prosecution for acts committed while being trafficked and underwent deportation proceedings.(32, 35) An international organization reported that KRG authorities arrested, detained, and interrogated, approximately 180 child soldiers between the ages of 11 and 17 years old for their alleged association to ISIS; 17 of those interviewed reported torture during interrogation.(32)

#### 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 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Inter-ministerial Committee on Child Labor	Coordinate overall government efforts to combat child labor, research policies regarding child labor, and design and manage projects. Includes representatives from five ministries, including MOLSA.(19)
Joint Committee on Street Children	Coordinate the implementation of measures for removing and rehabilitating street children. Members include MOLSA and the Ministry of Interior.(30)
Central Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons	Oversee implementation of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking and serve as the national coordinating body on trafficking in persons. Led by the Ministry of Interior, also includes representatives from five ministries, the KRG Ministry of Interior, and two other state entities.(6, 19) In 2016, the Committee held meetings and training sessions for its members, including KRG officials.(25, 57)
KRG High Commission on Child Labor	Coordinate interagency policies on child labor. Chaired by the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs; members include representatives from five other KRG ministries.(6)

#### V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Research found no evidence that the Government has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms.

#### VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

**Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor<sup>†</sup>**

Program	Description
Informal Education <sup>†</sup>	Government-supported informal education systems, including evening school programs and the fast education mode that encourages children ages 12 to 18 who have dropped out of school to continue their education.(30)

**Table 9. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor<sup>†</sup> (cont)**

Program	Description
Conditional Subsidies Program <sup>†</sup>	Provides assistance to low-income families for children to stay in school and out of the workforce.(6) This program was active in 2016, and provided financial support to hundreds of low-income families with the condition that their children remain in school.(57)
Shelters for Human Trafficking Victims <sup>†</sup>	MOLSA-operated shelter in Baghdad for human trafficking victims, including children involved in the worst forms of child labor; other facilities are in Basrah, Kirkuk, and Ninewa provinces.(55) The KRG operates three shelters for female victims of human trafficking and violence.(6) No victims used the shelter in Baghdad in 2016, partially due to security reasons.(25)

<sup>†</sup> Program is funded by the Government of Iraq.

<sup>‡</sup> The Government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms.(62, 63)

In 2016, the Government began drafting a plan to rehabilitate and integrate children liberated from ISIS, including child soldiers, back into their communities. In May 2017, the Council of Ministers approved the plan and allocated a budget for its implementation.(57) Research found no evidence of specific programs targeting children engaged in commercial sexual exploitation or brickmaking.

## 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 Iraq (Table 10).

**Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the laws comprehensively prohibit child trafficking in all parts of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, and do not require a showing of force.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure hazardous work protections apply to all children, including children working in family businesses under the authority of family members.	2016
	Ensure that the law in Iraq criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups.	2013 – 2016
	Increase the age of compulsory schooling in Iraq to at least age 15, the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2016
Enforcement	Publish information on the funding of the labor inspectorate; the training for labor inspectors; the number of inspections, including those by desk reviews; the number of imposed penalties that were collected; whether unannounced inspections were conducted; and whether a reciprocal referral mechanism exists between labor authorities and social services.	2011 – 2016
	Ensure that labor inspectors receive refresher courses on child labor.	2016
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO recommendation and ensure adequate funding to effectively enforce legal protections against child labor, including its worst forms.	2011 – 2016
	Ensure that labor inspectors in the Kurdistan Region receive funding and training on child labor in order to conduct labor inspections.	2016
	Ensure that children under 18 cannot join armed groups affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces to engage in combat.	2016
	Publish information on the training of criminal investigators, and the number of investigations, violations, prosecutions, and convictions.	2013 – 2016
	Establish a reciprocal referral mechanism between criminal authorities and social services in both Iraq and the Kurdistan Region.	2016
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement on the worst forms of child labor in the Kurdistan Region.	2013 – 2016
Ensure that child victims of human trafficking are not prosecuted.	2015 – 2016	
Government Policies	Adopt policies to address child labor, particularly in armed conflict.	2016

**Table 10. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Ensure that children are discouraged from enlisting into armed groups and receiving military training.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure universal access to education, including for refugee and internally displaced children.	2013 – 2016
	Improve the security situation of the human trafficking shelters so that victims can use them.	2016
	Implement programs to address relevant child labor sectors in Iraq, such as commercial sexual exploitation and brickmaking, and demobilize and reintegrate children engaged in armed groups.	2009 – 2016

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