

In 2021, Lebanon made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. A United Nations Children's Fund-funded project trained police officers in Tripoli to identify child labor and refer children to social services. However, children in Lebanon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including use in the production and trafficking of drugs, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced labor in agriculture. Children also engage in child labor in the production of potatoes and tobacco. Furthermore, government officials continued to indicate that funding is insufficient to properly carry out their duties. In addition, labor inspectors can only conduct inspections in formal places of employment, in which child labor is nearly non-existent, and social programs targeting child labor remained insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Lebanon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including use in the production and trafficking of drugs, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced labor in agriculture. (1,2) Children also engage in child labor in the production of potatoes and tobacco. (3,4) Data on key indicators on children's work and education are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (5)
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2021. (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	Farming, including the production of potatoes, olives, beans, figs, grapes, eggplants, and cannabis (1-4,7-11)
	Production of tobacco† (11)
	Fishing, activities unknown (2,7)
Industry	Construction,† including carpentry, tiling, and welding† (1-4,7,9)
	Making handicrafts (2,12,13)
	Working in aluminum factories (14)
	Working in slaughterhouses† and butcheries (12)
Services	Street work,† including begging, street vending, portering, washing cars, scavenging garbage,† and shining shoes (1,2,4,7,9,15-19)
	Maintenance and repair of motor vehicles,† and painting† (2,9,12,16,19)
	Domestic work† (2,7,9,12)
	Cleaning sewage† and collecting waste materials, including scrap metal (9,12)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Food service,† including working as waiters (3)
	Working in small shops and groceries (2,3,7,12,16,19)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs, and arms dealing (2,4,16)
	Forced begging (1,10,15,16)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,12,20,21)
	Forced labor in agriculture (1,3,4,9,12)

† 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.

Multiple crises have converged on Lebanon that have increased the rate of child labor, including a national economic crisis that began in 2019 and continued to worsen throughout the reporting period, the prolonged presence of Syrian refugees, and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has created new barriers to education and accelerated economic decline. (7,13) Multi-dimensional poverty in Lebanon has increased from 42 percent in 2019 to 82 percent in 2021, including virtually all of Lebanon's refugee population. (22) As a result of worsening conditions, UNICEF reported that the rate of child labor has increased from 2.6 percent to 4.4 percent, with agriculture and street work making up most of the increase. (7,23) In addition, 12 percent of families report sending at least 1 child to work and 7 times more Lebanese households have a working child than in previous years. (22)

UNHCR estimates that there were 1.5 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon as of November 2021 with 90 percent living in extreme poverty, making Syrian refugee children vulnerable to exploitation. (24) Child labor is also prevalent in other refugee communities in Lebanon, including the Palestinian and Iraqi communities. (13) Syrian refugee children are subjected to forced labor in agriculture. (1,3,12) Some Syrian refugee children and their families in the Bekaa Valley are kept in bonded labor in agriculture to pay for makeshift dwellings provided by landowners. (25,26) An estimated 75 percent of Syrian refugee children working in the Bekaa Valley do so in agriculture. (27) Adult Syrian refugees face legal restrictions that allow them to work only in agriculture, construction, and sanitation. (12,28) These restrictions on adults make children vulnerable to child labor. (9)




Children in Lebanon, particularly Syrian refugee children, face barriers to accessing education, including the cost of transportation and supplies, fear of passing checkpoints or of violence, lack of private sanitation facilities for girls, discrimination, bullying, corporal punishment, and a different curriculum in Lebanon than in their country of origin. (3,4,7,29) In 2021, the government continued its policy of admitting all refugee children regardless of whether they have the required documentation for school enrollment. (7) However, the public school system in Lebanon lacks the capacity to accommodate the large number of school-age Syrian refugee children. (13) Despite the official policy of schools being open to all, in practice, some refugees have been denied access to schools. (4) In addition, children with two Lebanese parents are sometimes prioritized in school enrollment over children with a non-Lebanese father. (30) Students without transcripts are only eligible to receive a certificate, rather than a diploma, causing some undocumented students to drop out. (4)

Before the pandemic, more than 50 percent of Syrian refugee children and 35 percent of Palestinian refugee children were not enrolled in formal education. (16,31,32) Children with disabilities, particularly refugee children, were unable to attend school due to insufficient accessibility or inadequacy of facilities, lack of specialized facilities, or unavailability of tailored services for children with disabilities. (29,33) In addition, the economic crisis has precipitated a movement of Lebanese children from private schools to public schools, putting further strain on an overburdened system. (2,7) Lebanese and refugee children who work in agriculture often do not attend school during harvesting and planting seasons. (34) One local organization observed a direct correlation between school dropout rates and an increase in child labor. (16)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Lebanon has ratified most 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 Lebanon's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 22 of the Labor Code (35)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 1-2 and Annex 2 of Decree No. 8987 (36)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Annex 1 of Decree No. 8987 (36)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 8 of Decree No. 3855; Articles 569 and 586.1 of the Penal Code (37,38)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 586.1 and 586.5 of the Penal Code (38)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 506, 523, 525–527, 586.1, and 586.5 of the Penal Code; Decree No. 8987 (36,38)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 586.1, 586.5, and 618 of the Penal Code; Article 13 of the Law on Drugs (38,39)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 30 of the National Defense Law (40)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 586.1 of the Penal Code; Annex 1 of Decree No. 8987 (36,38)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15‡	Article 49 of the Education Law (41)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 49 of the Education Law (41)

* Country has no conscription (42)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (41)

The Labor Code only applies to workers who perform work in industrial, trading, or agricultural enterprises and excludes domestic work and non-industrial, non-trade agriculture. (35) This does not conform to international standards that require all children to be protected by the minimum age for work.

In Lebanon, basic education is compulsory. (41) Children generally complete basic education at age 15. (41) The minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education.

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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 enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor	Enforces child labor laws through desk review and workplace inspections. (4) The Ministry's Child Labor Unit acts as government focal point for child labor issues and raises public awareness about child labor and the right to education. Receives complaints of child labor violations on its Child Labor Unit hotline. (4)
Internal Security Forces (ISF)	Enforce laws regarding child labor through the Anti-Human Trafficking and Moral Crimes Unit. (4)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes violations of the Penal Code in coordination with ISF. Maintains general data and statistics on criminal violations involving child labor. (4) Refers at-risk children to shelters and protection services. Coordinates, through signed agreements, with civil society organizations to provide social workers who oversee court proceedings involving juveniles and deliver services to them, including children engaged in begging. (4)
Directorate of General Security	Focuses on immigration and border protection. Works with the farmers' union to address child labor in agriculture. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Lebanon took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the lack of a mechanism to assess civil penalties.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	34 (7)	34 (43)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	No (44)	No (44)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (44)	Yes (44)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (7)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (2)

In 2021, labor inspections were only conducted for emergency cases, which are received through an MOL-operated hotline or the Child Labor Unit webpage. (7) According to local observers, the MOL's hotline is not fully functional and works for a limited number of hours on official workdays. It does not have a system to register incoming calls. (16) The MOL did not receive any emergency complaints regarding child labor during the reporting period. (43) In addition, government officials in the past have expressed frustration that they can only conduct inspections in formal places of employment, in which child labor is nearly non-existent. (4, 12, 13, 45) Government officials continued to indicate that funding is insufficient to properly carry out their duties. (2) The MOL had only one car and two inspectors in each district. (43) In 2021, the labor inspectorate curtailed the number of inspections it conducted due to the ongoing economic crisis and concerns over the government's ability to pay salaries. (2)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Lebanon’s workforce, which includes more than 2.1 million workers. (4) According to the ILO’s technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Lebanon would need to employ about 144 labor inspectors. (46,47)

The government does not publicly release information on its labor law enforcement efforts. (12)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Lebanon took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient allocation of financial resources.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (7)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Investigations	98 (7)	46 (2)
Number of Violations Found	98 (7)	46 (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (7)	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	1 (7)	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (7)	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (2)

In 2021, a UNICEF-funded project trained police officers in Tripoli to identify child labor and refer children to social services. In addition, NGOs provided training to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) and local police to help authorities address the needs of street children. (2) The ISF’s anti-trafficking unit is reportedly underfunded and understaffed, and it has no field offices outside Beirut. (1) The Ministry of Justice has stated that a lack of sufficient human resources hindered the government’s ability to address child labor. (13)

The government did not provide information on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report.

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 effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including lack of efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee on Child Labor	Raises awareness; coordinates efforts among government agencies; establishes standard practices; develops, enforces, and recommends changes; and ensures that government agencies comply with the law. Led by the Minister of Labor, includes representatives from six other ministries and other institutions and international organizations. (13) Active in 2021. (43)
National Steering Committee on Trafficking in Persons	Coordinates efforts against human trafficking, including child trafficking. Based at the Ministry of Labor and meets on a monthly basis. (13) Active in 2021. (43)
UNICEF and UNHCR	Coordinate efforts to address the needs of children affected by the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. UN representatives identify crucial concerns, including factors that make children vulnerable to child labor. (13) Make recommendations to the government on the use of resources, including referral services. (13) UN agencies and international and local NGOs coordinate child protection efforts through Child Protection Working Groups. (12) Active in 2021. (24)

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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 a lack of implementation.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to End Street Begging by Children	Seeks to end child begging by ensuring legal protection for street children, building capacity to protect street children, rehabilitating and reintegrating street children, and conducting outreach regarding the problem. (4) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Action Plan to End Street Begging by Children during the reporting period.
Policy for the Protection of Students in the School Environment	Protects children's right to education and promotes non-violence in schools by establishing mechanisms to receive complaints of violence, mistreatment, and bullying; and addresses those cases while safeguarding children's privacy. Trains school staff and officials on identifying risk factors. (48,49) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Policy for the Protection of Students in the School Environment during the reporting period.
Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon	Provides the policy framework for the prevention of children's involvement in armed conflict. (50) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon during the reporting period.

The National Action Plan on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor expired in 2019, and the government has not renewed it.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, 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 of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Child Protection Program	Joint program by UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Addresses child labor through interventions, including a non-formal education program for children, child protection services, skills development, and social assistance. (4) Active in 2021. (51)
Reaching All Children with Education (RACE II) (2017–2021)	Donor-funded, 5-year project, implemented by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and partners to ensure quality educational opportunities for children ages 3 to 18, regardless of nationality, through holistic interventions that address the demand and availability of quality public education, including non-formal education. (52) Active in 2021. (53)
National Poverty Alleviation Program†	Funded by the government and foreign donors, this program housed at the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Social Affairs provided WFP food vouchers (\$27 per month) for each member of poor families. It also provided school tuition and book costs for secondary school students from 43,000 poor families. (33) This program closed in 2021. (54)

† Program is funded by the Government of Lebanon.

Although Lebanon has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, including in construction and forced child labor in agriculture. Moreover, some officials are reluctant to remove children trafficked by their families due to a lack of adequate social services. (10)

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 Lebanon (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict, which the government signed in 2002.	2013 – 2021
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2021
	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including informal workers, domestic workers, and all agricultural workers.	2019 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that there is an adequate mechanism to receive and log child labor complaints and refer them for investigation.	2017 – 2021
	Track and publish information on labor law enforcement.	2009 – 2021
	Authorize the labor inspectorate to assess penalties.	2015 – 2021
	Provide Ministry of Labor inspectors with proper funding and resources.	2011 – 2021
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2016 – 2021
	Publish information on criminal enforcement of child labor laws.	2009 – 2021
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies, including the Internal Security Forces' anti-human trafficking unit, have the necessary funding and staff to investigate and prosecute criminal cases of child labor in accordance with the law.	2017 – 2021
Government Policies	Ensure that the Work Plan to Prevent and Respond to the Association of Children with Armed Violence in Lebanon is implemented, and that children previously associated with armed conflict receive social and rehabilitation services.	2017 – 2021
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor during the reporting period and that data on these activities are published.	2021
	Adopt a new action plan to address the worst forms of child labor.	2020 – 2021
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure access to public education for all children, including refugees, by improving transportation, addressing bullying and harassment, accommodating students with disabilities, and improving facilities.	2010 – 2021
	Expand programs, including social services for human trafficking survivors, to fully address the extent of child labor, including in construction and forced labor in agriculture.	2013 – 2021

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