

In 2021, Namibia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government substantially drafted an updated National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons to guide responses to human trafficking, including of children, and substantially increased funding for shelters servicing the physical and psychosocial needs of trafficking survivors. In addition, the government coordinated a training with the International Organization for Migration for front line officers and humanitarian actors to identify and respond to human trafficking in response to growing climate migration. Children in Namibia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in domestic work and street work. Prevention and elimination of child labor are not integrated into key national policies. In addition, social programs do not address child labor in agriculture and domestic work.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Namibia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also engage in domestic work and street work. (1,2) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Namibia. Data on some of these indicators 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 (%)		93.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (3)

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 and gardens (4-7)
Services	Domestic work (1,6-9)
	Street work, including begging and selling candies, fruits, phone vouchers, and small goods (8,10-14)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, including in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2,4,8,9,15,16)
	Use in illicit activities, including organized begging, selling of drugs, and smuggling of fuel and wildlife products (1,8,9,17)
	Forced labor in agriculture, fishing, and domestic work (2,15,16,18)

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

An extended drought and economic downturn in northern Namibia and southern Angola have likely affected children’s vulnerability to child labor, including its worst forms. Children from rural areas move to urban centers, such as Windhoek, in pursuit of supplemental income for their families. (1) Some of these children engage in selling drugs, organized begging, and commercial sexual exploitation. (4,8,11) There was a significant increase in

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the number of Angolans migrating to Namibia as a result of climate change, which has led to emerging trends of locals hiring Angolan children as domestic workers, for street vending, and for agricultural activities. In addition, NGO and local media reporting indicates children of refugee status are increasingly recruited by criminal organizations to smuggle drugs, fuel, and wildlife products. (9,14)




Commercial sexual exploitation most commonly involves girls and occurs in cities and transit corridors, especially along the Namibian and Angolan border. Both girls and boys increasingly are subjected to Internet-based forms of sexual exploitation, including use in the production of pornography. (1,4,8,9,19) Children are trafficked within Namibia and from neighboring countries, such as Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation. (1,2) It is a common practice for parents to place their children in the care of relatives and kin relations for expanded education opportunities; in some cases, these children are subjected to forced labor. (2) Children of the San and OvaZemba ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable to forced labor on farms and in homes. (2,16)

Both primary and secondary education are free by law; however, long distances to schools, particularly in rural and remote locations, may deter some children from attending school and increase their vulnerability to child labor. (20-22) The Education Act stipulates that no child be denied education due to documentation. (9,21) However, reporting indicates that children from nomadic communities and migrant families have difficulty securing birth registration and other identification documents, which sometimes results in delays in enrollment in school admission and access to social programs. (23,24) Children orphaned by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other causes sometimes become heads of households, which requires them to leave school to find work. (20)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Namibia 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 (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	18	Chapter 2, Article 3(2) of the Labor Act (25)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Chapter 2, Article 3(4) of the Labor Act; Article 2(2) of the Labor Act (Regulations Related to Domestic Work); Article 15(2) of the Constitution (25-27)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Chapter 2, Articles 3(3)(d) and 3(4) of the Labor Act (25)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (Cont.)

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Chapter 2, Article 4 of the Labor Act; Article 9 of the Constitution; Articles 202 and 234 of the Child Care and Protection Act; Section 15 of the Prevention of Organized Crime Act (25-28)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 202 and 234 of the Child Care and Protection Act; Section 15 of the Prevention of Organized Crime Act; Chapter 2, Article 3(2) of the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (27-29)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Section 2 of the Combating of Immoral Practices Amendment Act; Section 234 of the Child Care and Protection Act (27,29)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 234 of the Child Care and Protection Act (27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Section 17 of Defense Act I of 2002 (Government Notice 189 of 2010) (30)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Section 234(1)(b) of the Child Care and Protection Act (27)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14 ‡	Section 53 of the Promulgation of Education Act (21)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 2 of the Education Amendment Act, 2017 (22)

* Country has no conscription. (31)

‡ Age calculated based on available information. (32)

Under Namibian law, children typically are only required to attend school until age 14 because the requirement is to attend school until the completion of seventh grade, which tends to be when children are age 14, or at the latest until children are age 16. (21) In 2020, the Namibian Parliament passed an updated Promulgation of Basic Education Act, which will raise the age of compulsory education up to age 18. The government has not yet brought the law into force. (12,33) Although Namibia's light work framework for children ages 14 to 18 has a list of activities that are not permitted and prohibits night work, Namibia's light work framework is insufficient because it does not prescribe the number of hours children ages 14 to 18 may work. (25) If Namibia raises the compulsory education age, the government must prescribe the number of hours children under age 18, the new compulsory education age, may work.

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, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation (MLIREC)	Enforces child labor laws and investigates allegations of violations, including forced labor, and cases involving human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Works on child labor matters with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety, and Security (MHAISS); the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare (MGEPEWSW); the Namibia Central Intelligence Service; and the Ministry of Education. (34) Refers children removed from child labor during inspections to MGEPEWSW for placement in social services. (35)
Ministry of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety, and Security (MHAISS)	Enforces criminal laws through the Namibian Police. Coordinates with the labor inspectorate of MLIREC to investigate criminal labor violations, including child labor. (34,36,37) Through the Namibian Police Force's 15 Gender-Based Violence Protection Units, collaborates with MGEPEWSW and MLIREC to remove children from human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, while providing medical and psychosocial care for survivors. (34)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Namibia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor, Industrial Relations and Employment Creation (MLIREC) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,439,225 (12)	\$2,809,265 (9)
Number of Labor Inspectors	52 (12)	Unknown (9)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (25)	Yes (25)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (12)	Unknown (9)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (12)	N/A (12)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (12)	Unknown (9)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	1,932 (12)	2,582 (38)
Number Conducted at Worksite	1,932 (12)	2,582 (38)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (12)	0 (39)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (12)	Unknown (9)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (12)	Unknown (9)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (12)	Yes (39)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (12)	Yes (39)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (25)	Yes (25)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (12)	Yes (39)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (12)	Yes (12)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (12)	Yes (12)

The government published only limited information about its labor law enforcement efforts and did not provide information on labor inspectorate funding, number of labor inspectors, trainings, or whether penalties were imposed and collected for child labor violations during the reporting period. Between July 1 and September 30, 2021, the labor inspectorate conducted labor inspections in all regions, targeting the construction, informal, and domestic sectors. (39) An inadequate number of inspectors located in remote and rural areas outside of the capital likely hinders enforcement of labor laws. (1) Although the government has not made publicly available information on the size of its labor inspectorate in 2021, 52 labor inspectors were employed as of 2020, which would likely be insufficient for the size of Namibia's workforce, which includes approximately 902,000 workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Namibia would need to employ about 60 inspectors. (40,41)

The MLIREC operates a 24-hour short message service (SMS) line for labor complaints, including child labor. (12) The government did not make public the number of child labor complaints reported through the SMS line in 2021. (9)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Namibia took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including deficient structures for prosecution planning.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (42)	Unknown (14)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (42)	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	No (42)	Yes (14)
Number of Investigations	4 (42)	Unknown (14)
Number of Violations Found	17 (15)	Unknown (14)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	1 (42)	Unknown (14)
Number of Convictions	1 (15)	0 (22)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (42)	Unknown (14)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (42)	Yes (14)

The government did not provide information on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report. Although the government initiated 18 investigations and 7 prosecutions related to trafficking in persons, research could not determine the ages of the survivors and whether the cases pertained to the worst forms of child labor. (14) In response to the influx of climate migrants to Namibia, the government, with support of the IOM, hosted a training for front line officers and humanitarian actors on identifying situations of human trafficking and utilizing response mechanisms in contexts of emergencies. (14) An NGO operates a hotline for victims of gender-based violence and child exploitation to report cases and access information about available resources and refer cases to relevant government social services providers. (9)

Although there are 15 Gender-Based Violence Protection Units in Namibia, there is considerable variation in the operational performance of these units. Due to resource constraints, only the Windhoek-based unit is operating at full capacity, and several other units are not able to function according to their intended mandates. (1,12) In addition, the government does not maintain centralized statistics for regional magistrate court cases, which limits information on criminal law enforcement efforts in response to the worst forms of child labor. (20)

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 a lack of efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Interministerial Committee on Child Labor	Coordinates government policies and efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor. Comprises officials from MLIREC, the Ministry of Education, MGEPEWSW, MHAISS, and the Office of the Ombudsman. (34,43) Research was unable to determine whether the Interministerial Committee on Child Labor was active during the reporting period.
Permanent Task Force for Children	Implements and coordinates services for children at the national level. Includes key ministries, NGOs, development partners, and bilateral agencies. (34) Research was unable to determine whether the Permanent Task Force for Children was active during the reporting period.
Child Care and Protection Forums	Address child protection issues and coordinate services in the country at the regional and district levels. Raise community awareness of the signs of child mistreatment and available services. (44) Participants include 14 regional councils, MGEPEWSW social workers, police, teachers, government agencies, NGOs, community leaders, churches, and other local-level stakeholders. (12) Research was unable to determine whether Child Care and Protection Forums were active during the reporting period.
Trafficking in Persons National Coordinating Body	Coordinates and monitors government and non-government responses to trafficking in persons in Namibia. (45) Led by MGEPEWSW, with participation from MLIREC, MHAISS, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration, and the Prosecutor General and Attorney General. (46) The Trafficking in Persons National Coordinating Body met quarterly in 2021, including to facilitate national activities related to World Day against Trafficking in Persons. (22)

MLIREC-led joint child labor inspection teams, which coordinate child labor inspections and referrals between ministries involved in child welfare, have not been in effect since the end of 2017. (47)

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 mainstreaming child labor issues into relevant policies.

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Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Agenda for Children (2018–2022)	Leads strategization around child welfare issues with a focus on strengthening the protection of children in need of care, including enforcement of laws protecting children from child labor. (48) Outlines procedural instructions for each ministry and stakeholder to respond to cases of child mistreatment. (34,36,49)
National Development Plan V (2017/2018–2021/2022)	Outlines goals for addressing child trafficking and protection concerns. (34,50)

† The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (45,47,51,52)

Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor in Namibia during the reporting period. However, the government drafted a 5-year National Plan of Action Against Trafficking in Persons for 2022–2027 and will formally launch the plan in late 2022. (14) The National Plan of Action will guide anti-trafficking efforts, including strengthening coordination among government ministries and civil society organizations, protecting children and other vulnerable groups, and increasing public awareness, especially in rural areas. (15,16)

The 2017–2022 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare does not integrate child labor elimination strategies. (53) Although the Ministry's 2019–2023 National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence coordinates national efforts against gender-based violence, including rape and sexual abuse, physical domestic abuse, and human trafficking, it does not incorporate other worst forms of child labor, such as physical abuse occurring in domestic service and commercial sexual exploitation. (52) Research indicates that some children working in domestic service are subject to physical abuse by their employers. (51)

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 the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Social Protection Grants†	MGEPEWSW-funded grants to support vulnerable children and households. (53) Include child maintenance grants, place of safety allowances, and foster care grants. Child maintenance grants provide monthly stipends to single-parent families and are contingent upon school enrollment of all school-age children. Place of safety and foster care grants provide support for people and places that provide temporary care for children. (54-56) During the 2020/2021 fiscal period, MGEPEWSW added 1,814 children to the grant program and reached 64 percent coverage of orphans and vulnerable children. (57) In addition, MGEPEWSW provided food and school transportation assistance to 29,004 households. (57)
Shelters and Victims Services†	Government and NGO shelters that provide safe accommodation, meals, clothing, toiletries, psychosocial support, legal assistance, medical services, and access to education. (45) Registered residential childcare facilities provide services for children experiencing mistreatment and neglect. The government provides subsidies, either per child or as a percentage of operating expenses, for private shelter facilities. (46,49) In 2021, the government allocated \$408,910 to shelters, a substantial increase from \$22,150. (2,16)
Namibian School Feeding Program†	Government program that provides mid-morning meals to school children in all 14 regions. (34,58) To date, 431,500 pupils have benefited from the program. (59) In 2021, the government allocated approximately \$6.2 million to the School Feeding Program. School closures and procurement issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, delayed distribution of food assistance. (59,60)
National Youth Service†	Government program that offers training in civic education, national voluntary service, and job skills to unemployed youth, some of whom have never attended school. (44) Between 2017 and 2021, 318 youth have received skills training through the National Youth Service. (61)
Decent Work Country Program (2018–2023)	ILO-funded program to promote decent work in Namibia, including the elimination of child labor, through employment promotion, enhanced social protection, and social dialogue and collaboration. (45,62) Prioritizes institutional capacity for implementation of child labor policies and research and data collection on child labor and trafficking in persons. (7) Research could not determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Decent Work Country Program during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Namibia.

The government has 15 designated residential care facilities for children, but few of these shelters are able to provide complete services. The only fully operational government shelter is located in Windhoek; children who live in rural areas must go to the capital to receive services. (1) Although the government provided assistance and services to vulnerable children and some victims of child labor, research found no evidence of programs specifically addressing children working in agriculture or 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 Namibia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO's technical advice to ensure adequate enforcement of labor laws, including in remote areas.	2019 – 2021
	Publish information on criminal and labor law enforcement efforts.	2021
	Ensure that training is provided to labor inspectors, including training of new inspectors and refresher courses.	2021
	Ensure that training is provided to criminal law enforcement investigators on laws related to child labor, including training for new investigators.	2018 – 2021
	Publish information on the number of child labor complaints that are reported through the SMS hotline.	2020 – 2021
	Ensure that all Gender-Based Violence Protection Units have adequate resources to operate according to their intended mandates.	2018 – 2021
	Establish a mechanism to compile and publish comprehensive statistics related to labor and criminal law enforcement, including convictions for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor.	2019 – 2021
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and able to carry out their intended mandates.	2020 – 2021
	Reactivate joint child labor inspection teams to strengthen coordination between ministries that respond to cases of child labor.	2019 – 2021
Government Policies	Ensure activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor and publish results from activities implemented during the reporting period.	2016 – 2021
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies as well as other worst forms of child labor into key national policies, including the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.	2019 – 2021
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2021
	Expand opportunities for birth registration and national documentation for all children, including children of nomadic and migrant communities, to improve access to education and social programs.	2021
	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children by expanding social support to orphaned children and taking measures to reduce long travel distances to schools.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that school feeding assistance programs are fully implemented according to program mandates.	2021
	Institute programs or expand existing programs to address child labor in agriculture and domestic work.	2009 – 2021
	Ensure activities are undertaken to implement the Decent Work Country Program during the reporting period and make information about implementation measures publicly available.	2021
	Ensure that there are adequate shelters, including in areas outside Windhoek, to meet the needs of vulnerable children.	2019 – 2021

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