

In 2021, Panama made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government launched a new digital platform for reporting child abuse complaints, including cases of children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, begging, and forced labor. The Ministry of Labor also signed an agreement with the National Council of Private Enterprises that promotes a public-private partnership for the creation of a network of companies that work on the prevention and eradication of child labor. In addition, the government increased the number of labor inspectors from 93 in 2020 to 105 in 2021, as well as provided social services to 800 child survivors and children at risk of child labor. However, children in Panama are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Panamanian law allows minors under age 16 to engage in hazardous work within training facilities in violation of international standards. Moreover, labor law enforcement agencies lack the financial and human resources necessary to fulfill their mandate. Finally, existing social programs are insufficient to address the full scope of the child labor problem in the country, in particular for children living in rural areas and from indigenous and Afro-Panamanian communities.



## I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Panama are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. (1-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Panama.

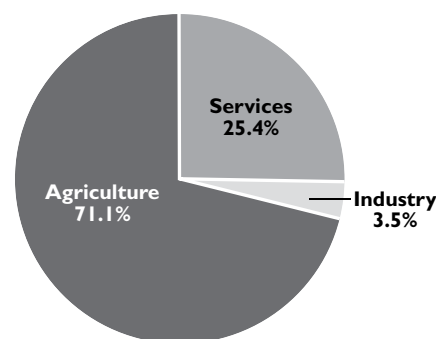
**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	4.5 (33,594)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	95.7
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	5.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		86.1

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Encuesta de Trabajo Infantil (ETI), 2016. (7)

**Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14**



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 coffee, melons, and onions (3,8-11)
	Raising livestock, including cattle and poultry (2,3,12,13)
	Fishing,† including harvesting shellfish (2,3,9-15)
Industry	Construction,† including painting and carpentry (1,2,14)
Services	Domestic work† (2,3,8,12-14,16,17)
	Waste collection in garbage dumps† (18)
	Street work,† including vending,† washing cars, shining shoes,† and collecting recyclables† (1,3,9,12-14,19)

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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 domestic work (5,20)
	Use in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,9,14)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,9,14,16)
	Use in illicit activities, including in drug production and drug trafficking, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (13)

† 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.

Children in Panama are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, as well as forced labor, particularly domestic servitude. (5) They also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, where their working conditions may involve the use of chemicals, machinery, machetes, and other dangerous tools. Additionally, children working as street vendors are vulnerable to exploitation, gang activity, harassment, abuse, and vehicular accidents. (13)

According to the results of Panama’s 2016 survey on child labor, the highest prevalence of child labor is in the agricultural sector in rural areas and autonomous indigenous areas, or *comarcas*. In particular, the *comarca* Ngäbe Buglé and the provinces of Panama and Bocas del Toro had the highest number of children engaged in child labor. (2)




In 2021, many schools held all their classes virtually because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This created barriers to accessing education, such as lack of internet and access to electronic devices, leading to increased inequality in education. (13)

Although the Panamanian Constitution recognizes the right to education without discrimination, indigenous children and those in rural and Afro-Panamanian communities face barriers to accessing education due to a lack of transportation, infrastructure, quality sanitation, technology, and teachers, particularly in the *comarcas*. (1,9,13) Some schools lack potable water and electricity, and in some cases students in different grades are forced to share the same classroom. (13) Children of indigenous descent often live in difficult to reach areas due to lack of roads and have to travel significant distances to reach school. (21) Indigenous children have very low school enrollment rates, especially in secondary and higher education. (23) Panamanian law requires that schools integrate children with disabilities, but most public schools do not have adequate facilities for them. (24)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Panama 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). However, gaps exist in Panama’s legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including establishing a minimum age for hazardous and light work that meets international standards.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Article 70 of the Constitution; Articles 508–509 and 716 of the Family Code; Articles 117, 119, and 123 of the Labor Code (25-27)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	No	18	Article 510 of the Family Code; Article 203 of the Penal Code; Article 4 of Executive Decree No. 19 of 2006; Article 118 of the Labor Code (25-30)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 2, 2A, and 2B of Executive Decree No. 19 of 2006; Article 118 of the Labor Code (27,28,30)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 207 and 456 of the Penal Code; Article 489 of the Family Code; Articles 4 and 63 of Law 79 on Human Trafficking; Article 21 of the Constitution (25,26,29,31)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 205–208 and 456 of the Penal Code; Article 489.17 of the Family Code; Article 63 of Law 79 on Human Trafficking (26,29,31)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 179–187, 189–191, 202–203, 207, and 456 of the Penal Code; Article 63 of Law 79 on Human Trafficking (29,31)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 318, 333, and 336 of the Penal Code; Article 489.16 of the Family Code; Article 2.16 of Executive Decree No. 19 of 2006 (26,29,30)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A†		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 448 of the Penal Code (29)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes		Articles 34 and 45 of the Law on Education; Article 489 of the Family Code; Article 95 of the Constitution (25,26,32,33)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 34 and 41 of the Law on Education; Article 95 of the Constitution (25,32,33)

† Country has no standing military (25)

Currently, Panamanian law has a list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children under age 18, but it permits children to perform such work in training programs starting at age 14, in violation of international standards. (28)

Although the Constitution, Family Code, and Labor Code set the minimum age for employment at age 14, the Family Code and Labor Code specify exceptions for agricultural work. (25-27) Article 119 of the Labor Code allows children ages 12 to 15 to perform light work in agriculture if the work is outside of regular school hours. The Labor Code, however, does not define the kinds of activities children may perform as light work. (27) In addition, 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.

### 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.

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

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor (MITRADEL)	Enforces child labor laws through two directorates with direct authority over child labor matters: the Directorate Against Child Labor and for the Protection of Adolescent Workers (DIRETIPAT), and the Labor Inspection Directorate. DIRETIPAT is responsible for overseeing the enforcement of laws related to working children in the formal and informal sectors, planning and executing public policies, and carrying out education programs on child labor for employers, parents, and children. (16,34,35) DIRETIPAT also manages the newly established Direct Government Action Program for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor that seeks to prevent and eradicate child labor. Refers cases of children found in exploitative work to the Child and Adolescent Courts, or to the National Secretariat for Childhood, Adolescence, and Family (SENNAIAF). (16) The Labor Inspection Directorate enforces the Labor Code in areas in which children may be working, particularly in the formal sector. (16)
Attorney General's Office	Investigates and prosecutes crimes of sexual exploitation. Investigations are initiated by the Judicial Investigative Directorate, after which cases are passed to the prosecutors. (16)
National Secretariat of Childhood, Adolescence, and Family (SENNAIAF)	Conducts inspections to identify children and adolescents engaged in child labor, particularly in the informal sector. (16,73) Coordinates, articulates, executes, and monitors compliance with policies for the comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents, through the formulation of plans, programs and protection measures, as well as the monitoring and coordination of government services to address the needs of vulnerable populations. (36,73) Runs shelters for victims of human trafficking, including minors. (13)
Juvenile Police	Assists, collaborates with, and coordinates with authorities and organizations to address the education, prevention, protection, and rehabilitation of children, including those in child labor. (37,38) It is a special body of the National Police. (13)

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Panama took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor (MITRADEL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including allocating sufficient financial resources.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,307,476 (9)	\$1,151,738 (13)
Number of Labor Inspectors	93 (9)	105 (13)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (27)	Yes (27)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (9)	N/A (13)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	10,478 (74)	14,686 (74)
Number Conducted at Worksite	10,478 (74)	14,686 (74)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	2 (9)	4 (13)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	2 (9)	0 (13)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	2 (9)	0 (13)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (27)	Yes (27)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (13)

In 2021, the government carried out a total of 14,686 inspections, 1,764 of which were child labor specific inspections, compared to 914 child labor specific inspections in 2020. (74) DIRETIPAT conducted inspections in two provinces: Panama Oeste and Panama. Inspected sectors included waste management, car washes, vehicle and motorcycle repair shops, spas, horse stables, and the transportation sector. (13) During the reporting period, DIRETIPAT found four companies to be non-compliant with child labor laws, there were two pending sanctions in 2021. (13)

MITRADEL, SENNIAF, and the Juvenile Police participated in 69 interagency operations for the eradication of child labor in each of Panama's provinces. (13) The province of Panama, which has the largest population, had the most cases of child labor, particularly in shopping malls, mall stores, and street vendors. Meanwhile, in the interior of the country most child labor was found in the agricultural sector. (13) SENNIAF reported removing 118 children involved in child labor and providing each of them with social services, including readmission to schools, health services, and grants, as well as follow-up to prevent recidivism. (13) DIRETIPAT identified 800 children and adolescents who were victims of or at-risk for child labor, including 298 children below the minimum age for employment, 3 adolescents over 14 years of age in informal jobs, and 499 children and adolescents at social risk whose condition of poverty may force them to perform child labor to help improve household income. It is unclear if any of these children were identified through labor inspections. (13) These children will receive care and services, scholarships, and academic follow-up for 3 consecutive years from the Direct Action Program for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor and *Casa Esperanza*. (13)

In 2021, labor inspectors were provided with in-person and virtual training on child labor and hazardous child labor laws, though most training was virtual due to restrictions put in place as a result of the pandemic. It is also unknown if all inspectors received training on child labor issues. (13) Of the 105 labor inspectors employed by the government, in the headquarters and regional offices, only 6 specialize in child labor and dangerous work, even though all inspectors must investigate and enforce child labor laws. (13) In the regional offices, all inspectors are multi-sectoral, inspecting for health, safety, administrative, and child labor infractions. Some inspectors are specifically assigned to the Department of Inspection of Child Labor and are responsible for verifying and enforcing laws relating to child labor. (13) MITRADEL and the National Secretariat for Childhood, Adolescence, and Family operate a secure 311 Complaint Line, a website, WhatsApp phone number lines, and social media platforms to receive complaints. (9,13)

During the reporting period, the government also provided training on the use and administration of the Child Labor Monitoring System (SMTI) in the city of Chitré for technical personnel and Regional Directors of MITRADEL, with the purpose of updating and strengthening competency on the management of SMTI. (40)

The budget for the Labor Inspection Directorate is insufficient to meet its staffing needs. DIRETIPAT reported a need for additional funding to increase the number of labor inspectors nationally, and for tools such as telephones and laptops to carry out their work. (9,13,21,41) During the reporting period, the budget of the labor inspectorate decreased in approximately 12 percent from that of 2020. (13) In 2021, Panama had 105 labor inspectors, which is likely insufficient for the size of Panama's workforce, which includes more than 1.9 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in industrializing economies, Panama would employ about 130 labor inspectors. (42,43)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Panama took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, the government did not provide sufficient data on its criminal enforcement efforts, which limits the ability to assess their efforts.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (9)	N/A (13)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (9)	Yes (13)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (9)	Unknown (13)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (9)	Unknown (13)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (9)	Unknown (13)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (9)	Unknown (13)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (9)	Unknown (13)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (9)	Yes (13)

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The government did not provide information on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report. In 2021, the government worked with various institutions and NGOs to train a broad section of government officers on addressing trafficking in persons, as well as in identifying and providing services to victims. In total 796 people were trained in topics related to trafficking in persons. (44)

The Trafficking in Persons Commission and the Organized Crime Special Prosecutor's Office have both indicated that it is difficult to prosecute trafficking in persons cases, partially because judges do not have specific knowledge of the trafficking in persons law. (44)

During the reporting period, SENNIAF and the NGO Crime Stoppers of Panama launched a new digital platform for reporting child abuse complaints. Through this platform, which is active 24 hours a day, people are able to report situations of abuse of children and adolescents to government authorities, including cases of children subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and begging or forced labor. (45) These complaints are received by a specialized team of the Juvenile Police, that works in coordination with SENNIAF, the Specialized Prosecutor's Office, and Crime Stoppers. (45)

## IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Committee for the Eradication of Child Labor and the Protection of Adolescent Workers (CETIPPAT)	Coordinates various efforts to combat child labor. Led by the First Lady of Panama and includes MITRADEL, the ministries of Education, Health, and Agriculture, and representatives from civil society and organizations of workers and employers. (46) Conducts a National Child Labor Survey. (73) It is a public-private institution that includes government, employers, workers, and NGOs that collaborate to address child labor. (13,16) In 2021, technical teams of DIRETIPPAT and SENNIAF met to discuss the implementation of the new child labor survey within the framework on the pandemic, and to begin its organization. (47) Together with the Ombudsman <i>Defensoría del Pueblo</i> carried out an awareness campaign in the Grand Station of San Miguelito on the human rights of children and adolescents, where it oriented peddlers, ticket sellers, and street vendors on the risks of child labor. (48) It also worked with <i>Defensoría del Pueblo</i> to develop a 2021-2024 plan to create a day of awareness, teach about bad practices, and promote children's rights. (49) Carried out trainings for parents and children on the regulations against child labor and work permits for minors in the province of Herrera. (50,51)
Subcommittee to Combat Child Labor	Coordinates the Panamanian Institute for Sports and the Ministry of Education in their efforts to address child labor and its causes. Subcommittee of CETIPPAT. (13) Reports indicate it was active in 2021, and that it held various meetings. (73,75)
Provincial Coordination Mechanisms	Identify and report cases of child labor at the local level to SENNIAF and coordinate with CETIPPAT at the national level. Established in Bocas del Toro, Colón, and Darién. (13) Additional commissions were established in Chiriquí, Veraguas, Herrera, Los Santos, Coclé, and Panama Oeste. (1,3) In 2021, it continued carrying out identification and reporting of cases of child labor, as well as held trainings for its members. (73)
National Commission for the Prevention of Crimes of Sexual Exploitation (CONAPREDES)	Coordinates, advises, studies, and implements public policies for the prevention and eradication of sexual exploitation. (46) Members include the Attorney General and the ministries of Labor, Education, Social Development, and Health. Refers cases of sexual exploitation to the Attorney General's Office. (46) In 2021, launched a campaign against sexual exploitation of minors called " <i>Soy Persona No Objeto</i> ". It was displayed in metro trains and stops, as well as in other high transit areas. (44) CONAPREDES also coordinated a week of media appearances on TV, radio shows, newspapers, and social-media platforms ahead of the campaign launch, together with a mass distribution of flyers in high transit areas. (44)

On December 27, 2021, officials from MITRADEL and the president of the National Council of Private Enterprises signed a Framework Cooperation Agreement that promotes a public-private partnership for the formation and articulation of a network of companies that actively work on the prevention and eradication of child labor and the protection of adolescents. (13,52)

## 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 of key national policies.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
Direct Government Action Program for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor	A MITRADEL initiative implemented through the Institute for Training and Utilization of Human Resources that provides a network of social and economic services to child workers and children at risk of child labor. Services include the provision of food and scholarships, support for sports activities, and social monitoring. (13) Replaced the Roadmap Towards the Elimination of Child Labor (2016–2019) in 2020. (9) During the reporting period, it provided scholarships for children and adolescents to incentivize them to attend school and not work. (18,53,54) Together with NGO <i>Casa Esperanza</i> will provide the 800 children and adolescents identified by DIRETIPAT in 2021 as victims of or at-risk for child labor with social services, scholarships, and academic follow-up for three years. (13)
National Multisectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violence Against Children and Adolescents (2018–2022)	Aims to eliminate child labor and end the mistreatment, exploitation, trafficking, violence, and torture of children. Developed by the national government through the National Intersectoral Committee for the Prevention of Violence Against Children and Adolescents and SENNIAC, with technical support from UNICEF. (55,56) Research was unable to determine whether activities were taken to implement this strategy during the reporting period.
National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents	Seeks to prevent and eliminate the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents, including by providing services to victims, strengthening CONAPREDES, and raising awareness. Implemented by CONAPREDES, with support from the Public Ministry. (13,46,57) In 2021, it held several meetings. (73)
National Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2012–2022)	Combats human trafficking through prevention, victim assistance, and international cooperation. Includes provisions to protect child victims of human trafficking. (13,41,58) In 2021, multiple government agencies met several times to coordinate the strengthening of the fulfillment of the plan, as well as to train officials so that they have the tools for the early detection of victims. (44)
Districts Free of Child Labor	Establishes cooperation agreements between MITRADEL and municipal councils to design and implement child labor eradication strategies. (3) Includes policies related to development and education projects that support poverty reduction. During the reporting period, five new agreements for districts free of child labor were established with the districts of Arraiján, Ocu, Santa Fe, La Mesa, and David. Additionally, the agreements with the districts of San Miguelito and Aguadulce were renewed. (73,75)

The Coordination Agreement on Labor Migration between the Ministries of Labor of Costa Rica and Panama aims to strengthen dialogue on labor migration between the two countries, with an emphasis on indigenous Panamanian migrant workers, to ensure social protection of migrant workers and their families. The policy includes a bilateral technical committee to promote joint action to address human trafficking, exchange information, and develop cooperative strategies and projects. (59) Although potentially a useful policy tool to combat child labor, child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

## 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 their ability to reach the most vulnerable populations.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description
SENNIAC programs to identify, remove, and provide services to children engaged in the worst forms of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation†	Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor identifies children engaged in the worst forms of child labor, removes them from exploitative situations, and connects them to a network of social and economic services offered by the government. Maintains a case processing system to efficiently manage reports and help reduce report processing times. (1) Prevention and Care for Child and Adolescent Victims of Sexual Violence identifies children engaged in commercial sexual exploitation, removes them from exploitative situations, and provides them with social services. Conducts training workshops nationwide for professionals providing direct care to child and adolescent victims of sexual violence. (60) Reports indicate these programs were still active in 2021. During the reporting period, SENNIAC commemorated the World Day Against Child Labor by distributing flyers on child labor in an effort to raise awareness on the issue. (61) Through these programs SENNIAC provided training to facilitate the integral development of children and adolescents involved in child labor. Additionally, 118 children received services from SENNIAC after having been removed from child labor. (13)

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**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)**

Program	Description
Network of Opportunities†	Ministry of Social Development (MIDES) program that provides conditional cash transfers to families in extreme poverty, conditioned on their children's participation in health and education services and the acquisition of a birth certificate. Offers training to project participants to improve income-generating opportunities. (62) In 2021, the cash transfers to vulnerable families continued. (63) Additionally, it provided rural women residing in the Ngäbe Buglé region a total of 7,380 pounds of yams and ñampi, in attempt to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of families residing in the region. As part of this effort the government also delivered vegetable seed kits, including seeds for cucumber, beans, watermelon, and pumpkin. (64) The assistance targeted vulnerable communities where sources of employment are scarce, such as Cerro Caña Centro, La Emergilda, and Las Trancas, which have a poverty index of more than 90 percent. According to MIDES this investment reached more than \$2.2 million and benefitted approximately 650 families. (64)
<i>El Plan Colmena†</i>	Seeks to reduce poverty and inequality in the country's most vulnerable districts. It prioritizes 12 areas of intervention including comprehensive childhood care, improved nutrition, access to clean water and basic sanitation, health, education, and the development of productive capacities to ensure the sustainability of communities. (73) It was active in 2021, conducting trainings on positive behavior and parenting, as well as family communication. (65-68)

† Program is funded by the Government of Panama.

Although the Government of Panama has expanded programs that reach children in rural areas and from indigenous and Afro-Panamanian communities, reports indicate that the scope of these programs is insufficient, and these children remain vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (69,70)

Despite policy efforts, the National Anti-Trafficking Commission acknowledges that funding for and availability of services for human trafficking victims remains insufficient to address the full scope of the problem. Furthermore, although victims of child trafficking are able to receive services from local NGOs, Panama lacks programs to specifically address the needs of this population. (4) Government officials have also noted that despite funds dedicated to the prevention of crimes against children, Panama lacks a specific mechanism to direct funds toward child sexual abuse victims. (71,72)

In the past, there were widespread allegations of abuse against children in SENNIAC facilities, specifically shelters, which were later verified through an independent investigation. Child trafficking survivors in Panama are referred by the government to SENNIAC to receive services, including shelter; these are administered by NGOs and religious organizations. (20) Yet, children in these facilities are vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers. Additionally, reports indicate that SENNIAC's budget is insufficient to support restructuring or other largescale efforts needed to reduce children's risk of suffering abuse, which heightened their vulnerability to trafficking. (20)

## 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 Panama (Table 11).

**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law protects children from hazardous work by establishing a minimum age of 18 for all children or by ensuring that children receive adequate training in the type of work being done and that the health, safety, and morals of children are protected in accordance with international standards if children ages 16 or 17 are allowed to perform hazardous work.	2013 – 2021
	Establish regulations that define the types of activities that children ages 12 to 14 can undertake as light work.	2009 – 2021
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2019 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that all inspectors receive regular, specialized training on child labor issues.	2018 – 2021
	Allocate sufficient funding for the Directorate Against Child Labor and for the Protection of Adolescent Workers to meet its commitments for coordination, implementation, and monitoring related to child labor.	2014 – 2021



**Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 105 to 130 to meet the ILO's technical advice.	2020 – 2021
	Collect and make available information on the number of investigations, violations found, prosecutions initiated, convictions obtained, and penalties imposed related to the worst forms of child labor.	2018 – 2021
	Ensure that judges are sufficiently trained on laws related to forced labor, the worst forms of child labor, and human trafficking in order to ensure that these crimes can be effectively prosecuted.	2021
Government Policies	Take steps to implement the policies related to child labor on an annual basis and publish information about these efforts.	2020 – 2021
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Coordination Agreement on Labor Migration between the Ministries of Labor of Costa Rica and Panama.	2015 – 2021
Social Programs	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children, including children from rural areas and indigenous and Afro-Panamanian communities, by expanding existing programs, including school transportation.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that students have access and equipment for remote education, when necessary.	2021
	Establish programs and ensure sufficient funding to address the needs of human trafficking victims, including programs that provide services to child victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse.	2018 – 2021

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