

In 2022, the Republic of the Congo made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government established a Child Protection Action Plan, which includes measures for assisting child trafficking survivors. In addition, child labor data were published in June 2022, resulting from a nationwide study carried out by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity in coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund. However, children in the Republic of the Congo are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and forced domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks such as working in mines and stone quarries. The government has yet to accede to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, and existing social programs are not sufficient to address the scope of child labor in all relevant sectors. In addition, the country lacks a national policy to address child labor.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in the Republic of the Congo (ROC). 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	25.4 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	92.9
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	27.1
Primary Completion Rate (%)		67.1

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 5 (MICS5), 2014–2015. (2)

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 in the production of manioc, peanuts, corn, plantains, sweet potatoes, and sugarcane (3-8)
Services	Directing road traffic (7)
	Fishing (4,6,9)
	Domestic work (3,4,6,9-11)
	Market vending and carrying heavy loads (4,5,11,12)
Industry	Working in mines and stone quarries, including extracting gold and breaking stones (7,11-13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as the result of human trafficking (4,7,11,12,14-17)
	Forced labor in agriculture, including in the production of sugarcane and manioc, and fishing (3,5-8,11,16,18)
	Forced labor in market vending, working in bakeries, and working in stone quarries (3,5,11,16,18)
	Forced domestic work (7)

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

In some rural areas, the majority ethnic Bantu population forces non-majority, indigenous children—such as from the Baka, Aka, and Kola groups—to perform agricultural work, including forced work, for low wages and under the threat of physical abuse. Within the ROC, internal child trafficking networks relocate children from rural

# Congo, Republic of the

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT




areas to urban centers for forced labor in domestic work and market vending. (3,4,9,16) In urban environments, including the major cities of Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville, children from West Africa perform forced domestic work for West African families. (3,10,11) Additionally, many foreign children subjected to forced domestic work or commercial sexual exploitation in the ROC originate from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and other West African nations, including Benin. (3,11,13,14)

The Constitution stipulates that education is free until age 16; in practice, however, some parents are required to pay for books, uniforms, and school fees, which may limit access to education for some children, especially indigenous children, who may also experience cultural and ethnic discrimination. (11,19-23) The government offers an expenses subsidy—"tuition waiver"—for indigenous children, but research indicated that the waiver program was not clearly communicated to families in remote areas, resulting in limited use during the reporting period. (4,8,11) The absence of sanitation facilities, a lack of teachers, and sexual violence in schools also pose barriers to education for some children, particularly in non-urban areas and among refugee populations. (11,20,24,25)

## II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The ROC 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 the ROC's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the absence of a list of hazardous work activities prohibited for children.

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 116 of the Labor Code; Article 68 of the Child Protection Code (26,27)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 68 of the Child Protection Code (27)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 4 of the Labor Code; Articles 68 and 122 of the Child Protection Code; Article 33 of the Constitution; Articles 4–6 and 14 of Law No. 22-2019 on Combating Trafficking in Persons (26-28)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 2, 4, and 6 of Law No. 22-2019 on Combating Trafficking in Persons (28)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 60, 65–68, and 122 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 334 and 335 of the Penal Code (27,29)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 68–70 and 122 of the Child Protection Code (27)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 30 of the Military and Gendarmerie Code (30)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 49 of the Child Protection Code (27)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 49 and 111 of the Child Protection Code (27)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 29 of the Constitution; Articles 1 and 3 of the Education Law (23,31)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 29 of the Constitution; Article 1 of the Education Law (23,31)

\* Country has no conscription (32)

Order No. 2224, which established a list of hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children, is no longer in force. (11,33) The government has yet to develop a replacement hazardous work list, and therefore has no current national law or regulation regarding the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. (8)

### 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 & Activities
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MOL)	Enforces child labor laws. (34) Conducts initial inspections before referring cases to the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous People (MOJ) for prosecution, and offers support to victims afterwards. (4)
Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous People (MOJ)	Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor. Dedicates two judges to child protection cases. (4,6)
Ministry of the Interior's National Police	Enforces criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor and conducts initial investigations into cases of forced labor, human trafficking, and the use of children in illicit activities. Conducts operations to rescue trafficked children used for labor exploitation. (3,4,6,9)

#### **Labor Law Enforcement**

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in the ROC took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MOL) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including a lack of sufficient resources.

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Number of Labor Inspectors	248 (4)	248 (11)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (26)	Yes (26)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	No (4)	No (11)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)

# Congo, Republic of the

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (26)	Yes (26)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	No (4)	No (35)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (4)	No (35)

During the reporting period, some government employees attended training with the ILO and the French Labor Inspectorate on workplace safety practices, workplace discrimination, and workers' rights. (8) However, inspectors did not receive any country-specific training on the enforcement of the ROC's child labor laws. (11) Further, training opportunities for labor inspectors, particularly for lower-level staff, are very limited due to a lack of resources, including budget shortfalls and a lack of internet access. (36,37) Research indicates that labor inspections are focused on large businesses and urban areas, while child labor occurs predominantly in rural areas, family enterprises, and the informal economy, including children working on their own account. (20) In addition, inspectors do not have access to government vehicles and rely on the employers whose businesses are being inspected to provide transportation. (8,38) Although the government lacks a formal process for referring children found in situations of child labor to appropriate social services providers, individual labor inspectors may leverage personal connections with their counterparts in other ministries to refer children found during inspections to social services. (3,4,9-11)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in the ROC 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	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (4)	No (11)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (4)	Unknown (11)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	No (4)	No (11,35)

The government provides funding for investigations, prosecutions, and convictions of suspected traffickers in the context of broader judicial and law enforcement programs. (10) In general, the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous People (MOJ) and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity (MSA) experienced difficulties in prosecuting offenders due to a weak judicial system, poor record-keeping, a large backlog of cases in the high court, courts that convene infrequently and irregularly, and criminal law enforcement officials' and judges' uneven knowledge of anti-trafficking legislation and the Child Protection Code. (14,36)

The MSA, MOL, MOJ, and the National Police work together to enforce criminal laws against child trafficking; however, their efforts are limited to Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire. The National Police lack funds for fuel, new equipment, and training on new laws, and sometimes demand payments from NGOs and other stakeholders to assist in or execute operations to rescue victims of child trafficking. (4,6,8,11,36) Research found that many police officers did not understand what constituted criminal child labor violations, and that court and MOJ personnel did not fully understand or know how to handle such cases. (3)

The government has an anti-child trafficking agreement with the Government of Benin that enables criminal authorities and social services agencies to repatriate children found in the worst forms of child labor. (11,39)

However, during the reporting period, no new repatriations or prosecutions took place. (11) The National Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons has the aim of coordinating efforts on trafficking in persons and forced labor at the federal level. Although Article 34 of the 2019 Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons provides a dedicated line item for funding the Commission, it did not meet, nor did it receive government funding during the reporting period. (11,28) Likewise, although there is a line item in the MSA's budget for activities to combat human trafficking, funds are disbursed irregularly or not at all. (36)

#### IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established a key mechanism 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 adequate funding.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Anti-Trafficking Coordinating Committee for Pointe-Noire (MSA Task Force)	With UNICEF support, coordinates all efforts to address trafficking of West African children in Pointe-Noire. Chaired by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity (MSA), with representatives from other government agencies and civil society organizations. (6,14,18) Lack of adequate resources and funding hinder the effective coordination of the MSA's anti-trafficking work. The Task Force has not been granted a specific operating budget since 2014 and did not meet during the reporting period due to lack of funding. (11) In addition, a local NGO has indicated that it refers cases to the Beninese consulate rather than the Task Force because the majority of victims are Beninese and the Task Force is unable to provide the NGO with financial support. (8,36)

Although the ROC has an Anti-Trafficking Coordinating Committee for Pointe-Noire to coordinate efforts to address human trafficking in a geographically limited area, it does not have coordinating mechanisms to address other forms of child labor at the national level.

#### 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 the lack of a national child labor action plan.

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

Policy	Description & Activities
Child Protection Action Plan (2022–2026)†	Updated and disseminated by the Legal Directorate for Child Protection under MOJ. Identifies specific measures for the Ministry to pursue in the area of child protection, including assisting child trafficking survivors. (17,40) The Directorate began implementing measures established in the plan during the first quarter of 2022, including human trafficking awareness campaigns in schools in major cities, and information sessions and trainings with the Ministry of Education. Other measures proposed in the plan include undertaking a census of relevant NGOs to improve coordination and providing training for Directorate personnel on human trafficking identification and protection techniques. (17,40)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (36)

In 2021, MSA drafted and disseminated an interagency 2022–2023 National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons. However, the plan lacked final approvals from the Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet, and President during the reporting period. (8,17,41) Research found no evidence of a general policy on child labor. (33) In addition, the government has not included child prevention and elimination efforts in its Education Sector Strategy and research found no activities to implement this strategy during the reporting period. (8,42)

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

In 2022, the government participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including inadequate efforts to address child labor in all sectors.

# Congo, Republic of the

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT

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

Program	Description & Activities
Safety Net Program ( <i>Lisungi</i> ) and Additional Financing (2014–2027)	World Bank-funded social protection project that provides cash transfers to poor households in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, and Likouala, and encourages children’s school attendance and use of health services. (25,43) During the reporting period, the government increased its participation in <i>Lisungi</i> and worked with the World Bank to expand the scope of social safety nets and protections. In 2022, the World Bank also provided an additional \$83 million in funding, increasing the total program budget to \$133 million. (11,25)
UNICEF Study on Street Children and Mobile Children, including Child Trafficking Victims (2021–2022)	A nationwide study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with MSA, under the aegis of the ROC’s National Development Plan (2018–2022). Aimed to provide an evidence base to inform social programs and strengthen child protection efforts, including for child trafficking survivors. (7) Published results in a research report released in June 2022, which includes key data about child labor and child trafficking in the country. (7,17)
Observe, Reflect, Act (ORA) Schools	Ministry of Education program supported by UNICEF, the EU, and World Food Program to improve access to education for indigenous children through a 2- or 3-year program to prepare them for schooling. (8,13,44) Sources indicate that ORA schools are funded primarily by international organizations, private companies, or the local communities, and that teachers are unpaid and work on a voluntary basis. (5,8,13,35,37,45-47)

For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

‡The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (4)

Existing government programs are not sufficient to address the scope of child labor in all relevant sectors, such as domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation. (4)

## 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 the ROC (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.	2015 – 2022
	Determine by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, after consultation with employers’ and workers’ organizations.	2022
Enforcement	Ensure that the government establishes a formal process for referring children to the appropriate social services when they are found in situations of child labor.	2020 – 2022
	Publish information related to labor and criminal law enforcement statistics, including the funding level for the labor inspectorate, the number and type of labor inspections conducted, violations found, penalties imposed and collected for child labor violations, number of criminal investigations conducted, convictions secured, and penalties imposed.	2014 – 2022
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents, including inspections of employers in rural areas, family enterprises, the informal sector, and those hiring self-employed children.	2022
	Ensure that all criminal law enforcement personnel, including from the police forces, courts, and the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights and the Promotion of Indigenous People, are properly trained to know how to identify, recognize, prosecute, and handle worst forms of child labor cases.	2020 – 2022
	Institutionalize training for all labor inspectors, investigators, and law enforcement officers, including offering periodic refresher courses and providing courses on child labor issues.	2014 – 2022
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by ensuring that inspectors have adequate resources to carry out their mandated inspection duties such as unannounced inspections, including access to government vehicles.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that funds budgeted for the National Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity to address human trafficking are regularly disbursed.	2019 – 2022
	Remove barriers to enforcement and prosecution by strengthening the judicial system through improved record-keeping, decreased court backlogs, more frequent hearings, and improved training for criminal law enforcement officials and judges on human trafficking legislation.	2014 – 2022
	Expand criminal law enforcement efforts beyond large cities.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that criminal enforcement agencies such as the National Police are properly funded and do not seek payment from stakeholders to conduct investigations and operations.	2014 – 2022



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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies receive adequate resources, including sufficient funding, to function as intended.	2014 – 2022
	Establish a coordinating mechanism to address child labor, including its worst forms, at the national level.	2009 – 2022
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Education Sector Strategy and ensure that policies are implemented.	2009 – 2022
	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant forms of child labor and the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking.	2013 – 2022
Social Programs	Improve access to education for all children, including those in non-urban areas, regardless of refugee status or ethnicity, by eliminating all school-related fees, removing linguistic barriers, providing sanitation facilities, building additional schools, training additional teachers, and ensuring that students are not subjected to sexual violence.	2009 – 2022
	Fund and implement social programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including child domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that indigenous children do not experience discrimination or barriers to education, including by raising awareness of tuition waivers available to them and providing instruction in their native languages.	2020 – 2022

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