



CAMEROON

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Cameroon made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government undertook a country-wide birth registration program and promoted school enrollment by providing educational materials, recruiting teachers, and designating inclusive schools throughout the country. Cameroon’s four education ministries established a joint framework regulating the admission of children with disabilities to all levels of public schooling, including higher education and vocational training. Specialists were assigned at 25 police stations in the Northwest and Southwest Regions to oversee crimes against children. In addition, the government provided rehabilitation services to around 1,400 child soldier survivors in the Northwest, Southwest, and Far North Regions. Finally, the government adopted the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Despite these efforts, prohibitions against child trafficking are insufficient because they require that children be threatened, forced, or coerced to establish the criminal act; contrary to international law. The law also does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities or the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. Cameroon does not meet the international standard for protection from commercial sexual exploitation because it does not criminalize the use of a child for prostitution or the use, offering, and procurement of a child for pornographic performances. The government did not report penalties for labor violations or efforts to enforce laws criminalizing the worst forms of child labor. Finally, 29 children were detained by national authorities for their alleged association with armed groups and on national security grounds; the United Nations Report on Children in Armed Conflict has verified that, as of December 2023, 14 children remained in detention.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	43.7% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	80.0%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	42.4%

Children in Cameroon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in recruitment by non-state armed groups for use in conflict. Children also perform dangerous tasks in cocoa production and gold mining.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Working in cocoa production.†



Industry

Artisanal gold mining,† including handling mercury, and digging or standing in stagnant water to extract minerals.



Services

Domestic work and street work, including vending and begging. Working in restaurants, as phone booth operators, and in transportation, including as assistants to bus drivers.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including fighting, gathering intelligence, providing operational support as porters and cooks, and sexual slavery. Forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, work in spare parts shops, artisanal gold mining, quarries, street vending, construction, and forced begging.

† 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.



SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Cameroon's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Ratify all key international conventions concerning child labor, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

Increase the compulsory education age from age 12 to age 14 to align with the minimum age for work.

Establish by law 9 years of free basic public education, in harmony with international commitments.

Criminalize the use of children under the age of 18 for prostitution. Criminalize the use, offering, and procuring of children under the age of 18 for pornographic performances.

Criminally prohibit the use of children for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.

Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.

Remove the requirement of threats, the use of force, and coercion from child trafficking provisions, and ensure that child trafficking prohibitions apply to all children age 18 and under.

Prohibit work at dangerous heights and underwater for children.

Enforcement

Ensure that children associated with armed groups are referred to social services providers, ceasing the practice of detaining them as adults.

Provide the labor inspectorate with sufficient funding and increase the number of labor inspectors from 224 to 773 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 11.6 million people.

Conduct inspections in all sectors, including mining and the informal sector, and institute routine inspections during periods of increased labor demand, such as harvests.

Provide training and funding for criminal law enforcement to investigate cases of the worst forms of child labor.

Collect and publish comprehensive statistics on criminal law enforcement efforts.

Train enforcement officials on how to identify child trafficking, ensure that survivors receive rehabilitation services, and raise awareness of referral mechanisms for child labor complaints.

Coordination

Allocate resources to the National Committee to Combat Child Labor commensurate with its mandates.

Ensure that the National Committee to Combat Child Labor monitors cases of the worst forms of child labor, improves coordination among agencies collecting and reporting data on these efforts, and publishes its activities.

Social Programs

Secure the autonomy and inviolate safe space of school properties, removing all armed groups from educational facilities and protecting the peaceful gathering of students and teachers for schooling. Provide a sufficient number of schools and teachers, allowing for basic classroom furniture, toilets, and sanitation.

Continue to increase birth registration and expand access to identity documents so children can access secondary school and exams.

Provide for the costs of books, uniforms, tuition, and additional school fees so all children are able to access education.

Increase funding and programs to address the full scope of the child labor problem, including street begging, gold mining, and agriculture.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Armed conflict and several regional crises in Cameroon and neighboring countries have displaced millions of people and disrupted livelihoods and schooling. Refugee children, primarily from Nigeria and the Central African Republic, along with Cameroonian internally displaced children are more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Children in the Far North Region are at higher risk of abduction and forced recruitment by non-state armed groups.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Many children in the Far North Region had no schooling, as Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacks had destroyed classrooms and forced residents to flee. In addition, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that 46 percent of schools were not operational in the Northwest and Southwest Regions as of November 2023. Separatists and other criminal groups attacked and kidnapped students and teachers, often to collect ransom. The UN Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict verified 50 attacks on schools, hospitals, and staff. In the Far North Region, 10 schools continued to be used for military purposes by the Cameroon Armed Forces (CAF) during the reporting period. Many public officials have fled crisis regions, leaving children without birth registration services and thereby making them ineligible for exams or secondary school and prone to drop out; often resorting to child labor. Additional school fees also pose a significant barrier for many families, including the cost of uniforms, instructional materials, textbooks, and Parent-Teacher Association fees to build classrooms and purchase chairs, benches, and tables. Further barriers to education include inadequate school infrastructure, including toilets and sanitation, and an insufficient number of teachers.








LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Cameroon has not ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. In addition, Cameroon’s laws do not meet international standards on free, compulsory, basic public education, the identification of hazardous occupations, commercial sexual exploitation, or the prohibition of child trafficking, or for commercial sexual exploitation.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 14 Years		Article 2 of Order N° 17 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Sections 2–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Sections 11, 292, 293, 342, and 342-1 of the Penal Code; Section 2 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Sections 2 and 4–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Sections 11 and 342-1, and 352–354 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Section 294 of the Penal Code; Articles 76, 81, and 82 of the Law on Cybersecurity and Cyber-criminality
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		

Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, 12 Years ‡		Preamble of the Constitution; Articles 9 and 16 of the Law Orienting the Education System
Free Public Education		Article 9 of the Law Orienting the Education System; Articles 46, 47, and 48 of the Decree on the Organization of Public Schools

* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The Decree on the Organization of Public Schools only provides 6 years of free schooling, but the international standard requires a free and compulsory education for a total of 9 years. The failure to provide for complete free basic education may increase the risk of children’s involvement in the worst forms of child labor. Cameroon does not meet the international standard for protection from commercial sexual exploitation because it does not criminalize the use of a child for prostitution or the use, offering, and procurement of a child for pornographic performances. Cameroon’s human trafficking provisions do not protect children aged 16 to 18 and require threats, the use of force, or coercion to establish the crime, contrary to international standards. Further, hazardous work at dangerous heights and underwater is not prohibited for children. The government has not addressed gaps in Cameroon’s legal framework regarding the prohibition of the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs and the recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal enforcement agencies in Cameroon took actions to address child labor. However, funding was insufficient to address existing challenges.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MINTSS): Enforces labor laws, including those related to child labor, and promotes decent working conditions. In 2023, MINTSS acquired 4-wheel-drive pick-up trucks to facilitate inspections, achieving a 9 percent increase in inspections compared to the previous year and conducting a total of 6,000 inspections. Officials said that security concerns in certain parts of the country limited the number of inspections conducted. Reports also indicate that the labor inspectorate lacked sufficient financial and human resources.

Criminal Law Enforcement Agencies: The Ministry of Justice prosecutes cases referred by the General Delegate for National Security or the Ministry of Defense’s National Gendarmerie. The National Gendarmerie investigates cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in both urban and rural areas and operates a hotline to report human trafficking crimes. The General Delegate for National Security is the national police service of Cameroon, enforcing laws against the worst forms of child labor and investigating violations in urban areas. Through its Special Vice Squad, investigates cases of human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse against women and children. The National Interpol Bureau coordinates with criminal law enforcement and social services agencies to identify children subjected to forced labor. Although there is a National Referral System to assist human trafficking survivors,

research was unable to determine whether stakeholders used the system during the reporting period. In August 2023, the Ministry of Justice organized a 2-day capacity building workshop for magistrates, social affairs workers, lawyers, and law enforcement officers on ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes	Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Unknown
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes	Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown

In 2023, although the government conducted **6,000** inspections, it is **unknown** how many of these were worksite labor inspections or investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor. In addition, it is also **unknown** whether child labor violations were found, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>Cameroon established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, there was a lack of sufficient resources to carry out mandates.</p>	<p>National Committee to Combat Child Labor (CNLCTE): Coordinates government efforts to address child labor. Led by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and includes representatives from other ministries and government bodies as well as representatives from civil society. CNLCTE held its sixth session on November 24, 2023, to discuss the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor and effectiveness of the toll-free hotline on child labor. The Committee did not report any cases of the worst forms of child labor during the reporting period.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Cameroon established policies related to child labor. However, the government lacks a policy specifically dedicated to addressing child labor.</p>	<p>National Development Strategy (NDS30) (2020–2030): Includes goals such as poverty reduction, access to basic services, improved legal frameworks on the worst forms of child labor, and 10 years of free basic education. In 2023, the Government of Cameroon, in collaboration with the UN Development Program (UNDP), organized a forum on development finance under the Joint Sustainable Development Goal Fund, which gathered over 150 influential actors to adopt measures to implement the integrated national financing strategy of the NDS30.</p> <p>Operational Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants (2021–2023): Addresses trafficking in persons, including child trafficking, by raising awareness, improving services to trafficking survivors, increasing prosecution of perpetrators, enhancing data collection, and coordinating anti-trafficking efforts. Includes the goals of identifying and suppressing forced child labor and the commercial sexual exploitation of children. In 2023, the government continued to implement the plan and drafted updates, which were still pending approval at the close of the reporting period.</p> <p>National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (Plan d’Action National pour l’Elimination des Pires Formes de Travail des Enfants au Cameroun) (2018–2025): A national policy and strategic instrument specifically dedicated to the elimination of child labor adopted by CNLCTE. Implementation of the plan was ongoing during the reporting period.</p>

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Cameroon funded and participated in programs that include the goal of preventing or eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors.

Shelters and Programs:† In conjunction with the National Employment Fund, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS)-funded Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children (Project 559) provides food, clothing, temporary shelter, medical services, psychosocial counselling, basic education, and vocational training. The Cameroon Childhood Institute at Betamba, also has an intake capacity of 240 overnight lodgers and can accommodate up to 500 day-time visitors, including child survivors of forced labor. MINAS provided similar care to trafficking survivors through seven shelter and rehabilitation centers across the country, which also offer special protection measures, as well as family, school, or socioeconomic reintegration. In April 2023, MINAS partnered with UNDP to launch a 6-month, \$415,000 project aimed at the socioeconomic reintegration of 700 street children in Douala, Yaoundé, and Ngaoundere.

Support Project in Quality Management for Cocoa and Coffee Production/Forever Chocolate (2019–2025):‡ Promotes labor standards in the cocoa industry, including the elimination of child labor in the Center, Littoral, South, and West Regions of Cameroon. Implemented by the NGO association, *Enfant Jeunesse Avenir*, in partnership with Cameroon’s largest cocoa processor, Cameroon Cacao Industrial Corporation (SIC Cacaos). Other key stakeholders include the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and the Family, the Ministry of Basic Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Services, and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Forever Chocolate guides farmers in the cocoa basin towards production methods free of child labor and includes supply chain tracing, monitoring, and remediation systems to ensure the eradication of child labor. The project also cares for vulnerable children by providing for school fees, school kits, and health services. Systemic curbs on demand for child labor were instigated by empowering women and providing families with alternative sources of income.

Zero Children in Gold Mines:† Implemented by the state-owned National Mining Corporation (*Société Nationale des Mines*) to eliminate child labor in gold mining in the East Region, which has more than 300 gold mining sites. The program reintegrates children into the educational system by supporting school registration, monitoring class attendance, distributing educational materials, and promoting the benefits of education and the dangers of mines to parents and traditional rulers. The program continued for a third consecutive year during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Cameroon.
‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit dol.gov/ILABprojects
For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports