

# CONGO, REPUBLIC OF THE

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, the Republic of the Congo made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Republic of the Congo became an Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Country, developing and adopting a Roadmap to accelerate its efforts to eradicate child labor by 2025. The Roadmap includes steps to strengthen the legal framework on child labor and forced labor, improve coordination and capacity of institutions at the local and national levels, centralize planning and data collection on labor exploitation, and create free education and vocational training programs for child and adult survivors of labor exploitation to support their reintegration. During the reporting period, the government also conducted human trafficking awareness campaigns in major cities and shared information and trainings on child trafficking with the Ministry of Education, for awareness raising in schools. However, despite these efforts, the government lacks a legal statute identifying the hazardous occupations prohibited for children. In addition, both civil and criminal enforcement agencies in the Republic of the Congo lack the funding, capacity, and training they need to enforce child labor laws and track data on their efforts to address child labor. Lastly, the body intended to coordinate interministerial efforts on trafficking in persons has not met or received funding in several years.



## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children's Work and Education

| Children                   | Age      | Percent of Population |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| Working                    | 5 to 14  | 25.4% (Unavailable)   |
| Hazardous Work by Children | 15 to 17 | Unavailable           |
| Attending School           | 5 to 14  | 92.9%                 |
| Combining Work and School  | 7 to 14  | 27.1%                 |

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 quarries.

### Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



#### Agriculture

Farming, including harvesting crops. Working in fishing.



#### Industry

Working in mines and quarries, including extracting minerals and breaking stones.



#### Services

Directing road traffic; domestic work; working in markets and street vending; and carrying heavy loads.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor<sup>‡</sup>

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in agriculture and fishing. Forced labor in market and street vending as well as in domestic work. Forced labor in quarries, including breaking stones.

<sup>‡</sup> 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 the Republic of the Congo's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### Legal Framework

Determine by national law or regulation the types of hazardous work prohibited for children, after consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.

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

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.

Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating routine inspections rather than performing inspections solely based on complaints received.

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.

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.

Institutionalize training for all labor inspectors, investigators, and law enforcement officers, including by offering periodic refresher courses and courses on child labor issues.

Strengthen the labor inspectorate by ensuring that inspectors have adequate resources, such as government vehicles, to conduct unannounced inspections.

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.

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.

Expand criminal law enforcement efforts beyond large cities.

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.

**Coordination**

Ensure that the National Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons receives adequate resources, including sufficient funding, to function as intended.

Establish and fund a national coordinating mechanism to address the worst forms of child labor in all relevant sectors, including in agriculture, mining, and domestic work.

**Social Programs**

Conduct a comprehensive study of children's activities to determine whether they are engaged in or at risk for involvement in child labor.

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, providing sanitation facilities, building additional schools, training additional teachers, and ensuring that students are not subjected to physical or sexual violence.

Ensure that indigenous children do not experience discrimination or barriers to education, including by raising awareness of tuition waivers available to them, providing instruction in their native languages, and facilitating obtention of the identity documentation required to register for national exams.

Fund and implement social programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

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 for low wages and under the threat of physical abuse. Rural children in general are more likely to engage in child labor in the Republic of the Congo. In urban environments, including the major cities of Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville, foreign children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Benin, and other West African nations are frequently subjected to forced domestic work, forced labor in market vending, or commercial sexual exploitation.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

While the Constitution in the Republic of the Congo provides for free education until age 16, in practice some parents are required to pay for books, uniforms, and school fees, which limits access to education for some children. Indigenous children additionally face exclusion, extreme poverty, lack of birth registration, and ethnic and cultural discrimination in schools. The government offers an expenses subsidy—“tuition waiver”—for indigenous children to improve their inclusion, but research indicates that the waiver program has not been clearly communicated to families in remote areas, resulting in limited use. The absence of sanitation facilities; a lack of teachers, schools, and transportation; and sexual and physical violence in schools also pose barriers to education for some children, particularly in non-urban areas and among refugee populations.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The Republic of the Congo has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, the Republic of the Congo’s laws do not include a list of hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children.

| Child Labor Laws and Regulations  | Meets International Standards | Legislation   |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Minimum Age for Work, <b>16 Years</b>   | ✓                             | Article 116 of the Labor Code; Article 68 of the Child Protection Code  |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>                               | ✓                             | Article 68 of the Child Protection Code   |
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children | ✗                             |   |
| Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor                        | ✓                             | 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 |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking  | ✓                             | Articles 2, 4, and 6 of Law No. 22-2019 on Combating Trafficking in Persons   |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children                     | ✓                             | Articles 60, 65–68, and 122 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 334 and 335 of the Penal Code  |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities                           | ✓                             | Articles 68–70 and 122 of the Child Protection Code   |
| Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>         | ✓                             | Article 30 of the Military and Gendarmerie Code   |

**Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)**

| Child Labor Laws and Regulations                                      | Meets International Standards | Legislation   |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military | N/A*                          | Article 49 of the Child Protection Code                               |
| Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups         | ✓                             | Articles 49 and 111 of the Child Protection Code                      |
| Compulsory Education Age, <b>16 Years</b>                             | ✓                             | Article 29 of the Constitution; Articles 1 and 3 of the Education Law |
| Free Public Education   | ✓                             | Article 29 of the Constitution; Article 1 of the Education Law        |

\*Country has no conscription



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in the Republic of the Congo took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient resource allocation and corruption hindered enforcement efforts.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Ministry of Civil Service, Labor, and Social Security:** Enforces child labor laws. Conducts initial inspections before referring cases to the Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, and the Promotion of Indigenous People (MOJ) for prosecution and works with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action (MSA) to provide support to victims afterwards.

**Ministry of the Interior’s National Police:** Enforce criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor and conducts investigations into cases of forced labor, human trafficking, and the use of children in illicit activities. Conduct operations to remove trafficked children from labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Collect evidence and refers cases to the District Attorney’s office under MOJ. A human trafficking module is included in annual training for law enforcement officials. While the police made efforts to enforce laws on the worst forms of child labor, there was reporting that some police demanded payment from individuals reporting a crime before acting to remove children from exploitation.

**Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts**

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|--|-----|---|---------|
| Has a Labor Inspectorate                 | Yes | Has a Complaint Mechanism   | Yes     |
| Able to Assess Civil Penalties           | Yes | Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations                            | N/A     |
| Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections | No  | Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes | Unknown |
| Unannounced Inspections Permitted        | Yes | Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes                 | N/A     |

In 2023, **248** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding **0** child labor violations. It is **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.



**COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS**

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|---|--|
| <p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>The Republic of the Congo established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, an absence of funding hindered its efficacy.</p>  | <p><b>National Commission to Fight Against Trafficking in Persons:</b> Federal-level interministerial committee intended to coordinate government efforts on human trafficking and forced labor, including of children. Research indicates that the commission did not meet and did not receive funding during the reporting period.</p>   |
| <p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>The Republic of the Congo established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.</p> <p><i>† Policy was adopted during the reporting period.</i><br/> <i>‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</i></p> | <p><b>Child Protection Action Plan (2022–2026):</b> Updated and disseminated by the Legal Directorate of MSA, with input from MOJ and the National Police. Identifies specific measures for MSA to pursue in the area of child protection, including assisting child trafficking survivors, undertaking a census of relevant NGOs to improve coordination, and providing training for Directorate personnel on human trafficking identification and protection techniques. In 2023, the government conducted human trafficking awareness campaigns in major cities and shared information and trainings on human trafficking topics with the Ministry of Education for school-based awareness campaigns.</p> <p><b>Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Roadmap:</b>† Action plan to accelerate efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, which calls for the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking by 2030 and the eradication of child labor by 2025. Includes actions to strengthen the Republic of the Congo’s legal framework, improve coordination and capacity of institutions at the local and national levels, centralize planning and data collection on labor exploitation, raise awareness among the general population, and create free education and vocational training programs for child and adult survivors of labor exploitation to support their reintegration. With the development of this roadmap, the Republic of the Congo became an Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Country in 2023.</p> |
| <p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>The Republic of the Congo funded and participated in programs that may contribute to eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address child labor in all sectors.</p>  | <p><b>Lisungi Safety Net Program (2014–2027):</b> \$145 million World Bank-funded social protection project implemented by MSA. Provides cash transfers to poor households in Brazzaville, Pointe-Noire, and Likouala and encourages children’s school attendance and use of health services. During the reporting period, the government worked with the World Bank to expand the program, increasing income-generating activities and reaching more young people.</p> <p><b>World Food Program (WFP) Programs:</b> Include school meals programs, humanitarian relief for refugees, support for smallholder farmers, direct food distribution and cash transfers, and capacity-building support for MSA, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Education, which help families meet basic needs and keep children in school. School feeding component comprises two activities: one that serves food provided through the U.S. McGovern-Dole Food Program and contributions from the Government of Japan, and another that is working to build the Congolese government’s capacity to implement and maintain a Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) program. In 2023, WFP programs provided school meals to nearly 126,000 children in 491 public schools and indigenous schools across the country. However, while the government participated in capacity-building activities, it has yet to disburse the estimated \$5 million budgeted for the HGSF program.</p>   |

**Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)**

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|--|---|
| <p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of the Republic of the Congo.</i></p> | <p><b>Education Initiatives:</b>† Ministry of Education programs implemented under the Education Sector Strategy (2021–2030), which aims to provide quality basic education for all young people and remove barriers to access for girls, indigenous children, out-of-school children, and other populations in situations of vulnerability. Include initiatives to improve infrastructure, build instructional and administrative capacity, and provide vocational and secondary education to prepare young people for productive employment. Observe, Reflect, Act (ORA) schools fall under this umbrella and provide 2 to 3 years of community-based instruction to indigenous children to prepare them to enter the formal primary education system. However, ORA schools are primarily funded by international organizations, private companies, or local communities, and teachers frequently work on a voluntary basis. During the reporting period, the government solicited input on improving the education system, integrated community-based teachers into the Ministry of Education payroll, and delivered training for primary and secondary school teachers.</p> |
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For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit [dol.gov/ILABprojects](https://dol.gov/ILABprojects)  
 For references, please visit [dol.gov/ChildLaborReports](https://dol.gov/ChildLaborReports)