

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – Efforts Made but Continued Practice that Delayed Advancement

In 2023, the Dominican Republic made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government enacted Resolution 10-2023, which added 14 additional dangerous and unhealthy categories of prohibited activities for persons under 18 years of age to the country's hazardous work list, including domestic work. The Ministry of Labor and the Attorney General's Office also signed an inter-institutional agreement to increase their coordination to address child labor. However, despite these new initiatives to address child labor, the Dominican Republic is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because school administrators continued to deny access to education to a significant number of children who were without identity or residency documents. Barriers to education access increase children's vulnerability to child labor. Children without identity or residency documents, most of whom are of foreign origin or descent, were also being prevented from receiving social services, including access to the government's poverty reduction and vocational training programs. In addition, significant enforcement gaps remain, including limited human and financial resources for labor and criminal enforcement agencies, and the lack of authority for labor inspectors to directly assess penalties for labor law violations. The Dominican Republic's legal prohibitions related to child trafficking are also insufficient because they require threats, the use of force, or coercion for the crime of child trafficking to have occurred.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	6.3% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	96.4%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	9.2%

Children in the Dominican Republic 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.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Working in agriculture, including producing coffee, rice, and tomatoes. Clearing land for sugarcane production, planting and harvesting sugarcane, and collecting cut cane. Farming.† Fishing.†



Industry

Producing baked goods. Mining.† Construction.†



Services

Domestic work.† Street work, including vending,† begging,† washing cars,† shining shoes,† and transporting packages in markets. Scavenging in landfills. Working in woodworking shops, car washes, auto repair shops,† blacksmith workshops, and in convenience store deliveries.†



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Forced labor in domestic work, construction, street vending, begging, and agriculture, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking, sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor is 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 Dominican Republic's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Ensure that laws prohibiting child trafficking do not require threats, the use of force, or coercion as elements of the crime.

Criminally prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

Enforcement

Increase the number of labor inspectors from 207 to 331 to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 4.9 million people, especially in remote rural areas.

Ensure that the number of inspections conducted by each inspector is appropriate to guarantee the quality and scope of inspections.

Improve case tracking so that labor inspectors are able to promptly follow up on violations and refer children to remediation services.

Establish a system to verify the age of young workers to better protect children without birth certificates or other legal documentation from exploitation.

Ensure that labor inspectors interview workers in a safe environment and that they are able to communicate with Creole-speaking workers, including those who may be underage.

Provide additional training to labor and criminal law enforcement officials on child labor issues, case documentation, re-inspection protocols, how to use inspection data to enable prosecution, on indicators of human trafficking, and on standard operating procedures on referral of trafficking survivors to services.

Increase human and financial resources to ensure adequate criminal and labor law enforcement related to child labor.

Improve coordination between the Ministry of Labor and the Office of the Attorney General to ensure that violations are adequately investigated, sanctioned, and prosecuted.

Provide legal authorization to allow labor inspectors to conduct inspections in the informal sector.

Government Policies

Take steps to implement the Roadmap Toward the Elimination of Child Labor and Its Worst Forms and Education Pact and publish information about efforts to implement these policies on an annual basis.

Social Programs

Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor to inform policies and programs.

Increase efforts to issue identity documents to all children and ensure that children without documentation, including children of Haitian descent and migrant children, can access education and social programs as provided by Dominican law.

Increase school infrastructure and teacher availability, especially in rural areas, remove supply- and school-related fees, and expand efforts to reduce discrimination on the basis of national origin in schools.

Ensure that children are not denied access to education based on their national or ethnic origin, immigration status, or lack of identity documents, and update all Ministry of Education school manuals to align with Dominican law guaranteeing that children without birth certificates or identity documents are able to enroll in schools and receive diplomas certifying school completion.

Expand social protection programs and specialized services for trafficking survivors as applicable, particularly for child survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, agricultural labor exploitation, and forced labor, and ensure that programs also provide services to vulnerable children who are without identity documents or regular migration status.

Ensure that the National Council for Children and Adolescents has sufficient resources and facilities to provide the necessary care for survivors of child labor and child trafficking.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Many Dominican-born persons of Haitian descent, including children, continue to remain in undocumented status because of a Constitutional Court decision in 2013 that retroactively revoked birthright citizenship of all persons born after 1929 to non-citizens in the Dominican Republic, almost all of whom were children of Haitian descent. In general, undocumented children and children of undocumented parents are particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation because they may lack birth or residency documents. This increases the likelihood that these children may be denied access to education or engage in child labor, including its worst forms, in part because labor inspectors may not be able to verify their ages. In addition, children in tourist locations are particularly vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation, especially in major urban and coastal resort areas.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

According to Dominican law, education should be free and compulsory until age 14 and accessible to all children, including those lacking identity documents. However, numerous reports indicate that a significant number of children without identity documents were prevented from accessing education in 2023 due to time-consuming processes and extensive documentation requirements, such as notarized and translated copies of birth certificates, and school transcripts or proof of past school enrollment certified by several Dominican and Haitian government ministries and entities. Moreover, despite a July 2023 Ministry of Education (MOE) directive to public schools noting that all children must be allowed to attend school regardless of their identity documentation, the MOE Operations Manual of Public Education Centers incorrectly instructs school administrators to request identity documents for school enrollment. This contradictory guidance has been used by some school officials to explicitly deny migrant children and Dominican children lacking documentation access to schools. While there is a process for appealing cases of education enrollment denial, sources indicate that government officials responsible for managing the appeals process were not responsive and that case resolution could last up to 2 years. Teacher and school infrastructure shortages also create barriers to education access in the Dominican Republic. In addition, a high percentage of students drop out at the primary and secondary levels. These issues particularly affect children living in rural areas and in communities predominantly of Haitian descent. Sources indicate that some children of Haitian descent face discrimination by teachers and peers, travel long distances to schools, and are unable to afford costs related to schooling.












LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The Dominican Republic has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, the Dominican Republic's laws do not meet international standards on the prohibition of child trafficking.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 16 Years		Article 245–247 and 249–253 of the Labor Code; Article 40 of the Code for the Protection System and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents; Article 56.1 of the Constitution
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Sections 1 and 3 of the Resolution Modifying the List of Hazardous Work for Persons Under Age 18; Articles 251, 720, and 721 of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Section 3 of the Resolution Modifying the List of Hazardous Work for Persons Under Age 18; Articles 246, 249, 252, and 253 of the Labor Code

Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 1, 3, and 7 of the Law Against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons; Articles 25 and 409 of the Code for the Protection System and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents; Articles 40, 41, and 62.2 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 1, 3, and 7 of the Law Against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons; Articles 25, 406, and 409–411 of the Code for the Protection System and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents; Article 41 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 25 and 408–411 of the Code for the Protection System and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents; Articles 1, 3, and 7 of the Law Against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons; Article 24 of the Law on Technological Crime; Article 56.1 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Article 85 of the Law on Drugs and Controlled Substances
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Articles 26, 29, 96, and 97 of the Organic Armed Forces Law
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Articles 4, 96, 97, 231, and 232 of the Organic Armed Forces Law
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, 14 Years ‡		Article 63 of the Constitution; Articles 33, 35, 37, and 40 of the Organic Law of Education
Free Public Education		Article 63 of the Constitution; Articles 33, 35, 37, and 40 of the Organic Law of Education; Ministry of Education Circular No. 18 of 2011; Articles 45 and 46 of the Code for the Protection System and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents

* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

In 2023, the government enacted the Ministry of Labor's Resolution 10-2023, which modified the list of dangerous and unhealthy jobs for persons under 18 years of age and repealed Resolution 52-04 of August 13, 2004. The new resolution expanded from 26 to 40 the number of specific types of work prohibited to minors under 18 years of age, including the employment of minors in domestic work. Despite this effort, prohibitions against child trafficking are insufficient because they require threats, the use of force, or coercion to be established for the crime of child trafficking under the 2003 Law on Human Smuggling and Trafficking (Law 137-03). Although the Code for the Protection System and Fundamental Rights of Boys, Girls, and Adolescents criminally prohibits accepting, offering, or transferring children without requiring threats, the use of force, or coercion as an element, it does not criminally prohibit the recruitment or harboring of children.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in the Dominican Republic took actions to address child labor. However, the lack of authority of labor inspectors to assess penalties and an insufficient allocation of financial resources hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor (MT): Leads efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor, supervises compliance with labor regulations, conducts labor inspections, and oversees the Directorate of Policies for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor. Refers children found in exploitative conditions to the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI) for social services. However, the labor inspectorate lacks sufficient financial and human resources to carry out adequate inspections and inspectors do not have authority to assess labor penalties, instead writing infraction reports that are sent to prosecutors in the Office of the Attorney General for enforcement action. In 2023, MT acquired 12 new vehicles to assist them in carrying out inspections.

Office of the Attorney General (AG): Prosecutes crimes involving children, including criminal violations related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and other worst forms of child labor. Oversees the Special Prosecutor for Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking, which receives notifications of alleged violations related to the worst forms of child labor through a hotline. Reports indicate that some cases referred to the AG by the MT are not investigated and prosecuted by the AG due to a lack of coordination between these two entities. In 2023, the AG signed an agreement with the MT to increase coordination on efforts related to addressing child labor, as well as developing new avenues of collaboration. As part of the agreement, the AG agreed to establish specialized prosecutor's offices throughout the country, particularly in provinces in which there is a greater presence of child labor and its worst forms, and permitted the use of its hotline to receive reports from members of the public about child labor, which would then be referred to the MT.

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	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown

In 2023, **207** labor inspectors conducted **52,706** worksite inspections, finding **264** child labor violations. It is **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, although **59** prosecutions were initiated.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

The Dominican Republic established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

National Steering Committee to Eliminate Child Labor: Develops policies, approves programs, and coordinates, monitors, and evaluates efforts to address child labor in the Dominican Republic. Meets every 2 months, overseen by the MT, and comprises ministerial representatives, labor unions, private sector representatives, NGOs, more than 30 other institutions, and local steering committees in each province. Oversees the system for referring children found during inspections to appropriate social services. In 2023, the committee held six meetings, during which it developed the annual operating plan to coordinate government actions to address child labor.

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>The Dominican Republic established policies related to child labor. However, it is uncertain if the Education Pact policy implemented activities addressing child labor during the reporting period.</p>	<p>Roadmap Toward the Elimination of Child Labor and Its Worst Forms in the Dominican Republic (2010–2025): Serves as the national strategic framework to achieve the goals established in the Hemispheric Agenda on Decent Work related to child labor. Aims to prevent and eliminate child labor and its worst forms, and sets targets and indicators for poverty reduction, health, education, institutional coordination, awareness raising, and information sharing. Reporting indicates this policy continued to be implemented in 2023.</p> <p>National Development Strategy (2010–2030): Aims to reduce poverty and inequality, and includes programs to address child labor, provide universal education to all children, and expand access to secondary school, including for students without identity documents. In 2023, for the eleventh consecutive year, the government committed to allocating 4 percent of the nation's GDP to primary and secondary education as indicated by the National Development Strategy. However, reporting indicates that, in 2023, they actually allocated only 3.88 percent. The purpose of this continued funding is to improve the national education system.</p> <p>Education Pact (2014–2030): Includes strategies to address child labor and seeks to improve the quality of, and access to, primary and secondary education by increasing attendance and graduation rates and enrolling more students in the Extended School Day Program. Implemented by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and supported by the World Bank. Research was unable to determine whether activities to address child labor were undertaken during the reporting period to implement the Education Pact.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>In 2023, the Dominican Republic funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate because they do not address the problem of child labor in all sectors, including in agriculture and commercial sexual exploitation, and are inaccessible to individuals who are without documentation.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of the Dominican Republic.</i> <i>‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p>SUPERATE:† Aims to reduce poverty by providing low-income families with social protection interventions, including conditional cash transfers, socio-educational support, educational inclusion, housing, food security, and referrals to other government programs and services. One of the goals of this program is to increase children's school attendance and reduce child labor. Nonetheless, research indicates that SUPERATE is not available to families who are without documentation, including migrants and Dominicans who lack documentation. In 2023, the government continued carrying out cash transfers and joined efforts with NGOs to address hunger in the country.</p> <p>Oportunidad 14–24:† Supports high-risk and socially vulnerable adolescents and young people between ages 14 and 24 who have limited resources by providing access to technical professional training, scholarships, a monthly provision of raw food, and transportation to study centers. However, research indicates that individuals without documentation, including migrants and Dominicans who lack documentation, are ineligible to participate in the program. In 2023, over 22,500 youths were registered in this program throughout 119 centers, with over 3,000 youths having graduated from it during the year.</p> <p>Extended School Day Program (Jornada Escolar Extendida):† MOE program to extend school hours to a full day (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) to improve educational achievement and reduce child labor. This program was still active in 2023, and according to reports, over 1 million students throughout the country were enrolled in it during the reporting year.</p>

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