

# THE GAMBIA

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, The Gambia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, in partnership with the United Nations Children’s Fund and the Education Above All Foundation, launched the Zero Out of School Children project, which aims to ensure that out-of-school children and adolescents have access to quality primary education. The government also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Nigeria to coordinate efforts to address human trafficking, including child trafficking, through legal, enforcement, and prevention and awareness activities. Finally, the National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons established a national hotline and expanded their investigation team. However, gaps remain in the country’s legal framework, including that the minimum age for work of 18 years old is higher than the compulsory education age of 16 years old. The Gambia also lacked resources to conduct adequate enforcement efforts and has insufficient social programs to address child labor.

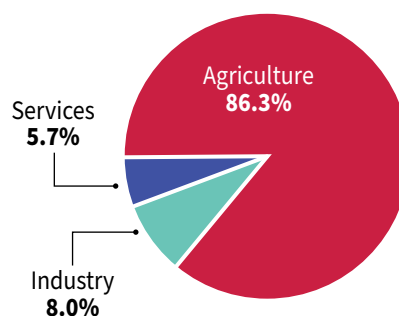


## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	23.0% (154,677)
Boys		23.2%
Girls		22.9%
Urban		9.7%
Rural		38.5%
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	36.4% (62,331)
Boys		34.3%
Girls		38.4%
Urban		22.0%
Rural		57.8%
Attending School	5 to 14	72.0%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	17.8%

### Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in The Gambia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced begging.

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



#### Agriculture

Farming, including protecting crops against animals.



#### Industry

Working in carpentry, masonry, sewing, plumbing, and in metal welding workshops.†



#### Services

Domestic work and street work, including begging and vending. Scavenging at dump sites, markets, and

car parks. Working as attendants to commercial vehicles in the transportation sector, and working as auto mechanics.†



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced begging by Koranic teachers. Forced labor in domestic work and street vending.

† 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 The Gambia's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### **Legal Framework**

Ensure that the law's light work and child apprenticeship provisions specify the activities and conditions in which work may be undertaken and prescribe the number of hours per week such work may be undertaken.

Establish by law a compulsory education age of 18 years old to align with the minimum age for work, which is 18 years.

### **Enforcement**

Ensure that agencies responsible for labor law and criminal law enforcement—including the Department of Labor and the Children's Court—are active, have adequate resources and funding to fulfill their mandates, and conduct inspections in all sectors, including at private homes and farms.

Publish information on labor inspectorate funding, whether unannounced or routine inspections were conducted, whether penalties imposed for child labor violations, whether criminal investigations for worst forms of child labor crimes were conducted, and whether penalties were imposed for worst forms of child labor crimes.

Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating routine inspections rather than performing inspections solely based on complaints received and ensure these inspections target sectors in which child labor is known to occur.

Employ at least 23 labor inspectors to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 936,600 workers.

Ensure that criminal law enforcement officers receive training related to child labor and ensure training covers all worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor, and the use of children in illicit activity.

Ensure that criminal penalties for the worst forms of child labor are consistently applied to deter violations.

### **Coordination**

Ensure that the National Coordination Committee on Child Labor is active and able to carry out its intended mandate of coordinating child labor enforcement processes, including prosecutions of the worst forms of child labor.

### **Government Policies**

Ensure activities are undertaken to implement the Code of Conduct of The Gambia Tourism Authority for the Protection of Children and The Gambia's Memorandum of Understanding with Senegal and publish results from activities implemented during the reporting period.

Adopt, implement, and publish the National Child Labor Policy, and ensure it addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.

Provide public copies of policies addressing child labor, including the Ethical Recruitment Policy Guidelines, Pre-Departure Training Manual, and the Labor Migration Strategy.

### **Social Programs**

Ensure that children can complete compulsory schooling by subsidizing or defraying the cost of supplies, uniforms, transportation, and other fees.

Enhance opportunities for children to access education by providing adequate classroom facilities, clean water, and sanitation; ensuring accessibility for students with disabilities; increasing the number of teachers in rural areas; and ensuring language barriers do not limit instruction.

Ensure students receive consistent instruction by providing support to teachers to decrease absenteeism.

Ensure activities are undertaken to implement key social programs, including the Conditional Cash Transfer Program, and publish results of activities implemented during the reporting period.

Expand existing social programs to address the full scope of the child labor problem, including all worst forms of child labor. Specifically, ensure social programs address children in agriculture, domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, forced begging, and in street work.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Refugee children born in The Gambia are at risk of statelessness, as Gambian law only grants citizenship to children with a Gambian parent, not all children born in the country. Individuals without birth registrations, especially children of single mothers and those in rural areas, are vulnerable to exploitation, including child labor. Senegalese children trafficked to The Gambia are exploited for domestic labor, commercial sexual exploitation, fishing, and street work such as begging or shoe shining. Although the number of children enrolled in Koranic schools called *daaras* is unknown, these children are vulnerable to forced begging, street vending, and agricultural work.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

The Constitution and Gambian law mandate free compulsory primary and lower-secondary education. Families, however, are often responsible for supplies and uniforms, exam fees, and contributions to school funds. In addition, inadequate classroom infrastructure, low numbers of teachers in rural areas, lack of transportation, teacher absenteeism, and limited access to clean water and toilets in schools create barriers for children to access education, increasing their vulnerability to child labor and exploitation. A UNICEF study found that 14 percent of teachers were absent from school at least once a week, with even higher rates reported in rural schools. Children with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing education, including the absence of special education programs outside of urban centers. Beginning in grade four, teachers are required to teach in English, which can limit learning for students who speak local languages. Teachers reported that students who spoke a language they did not speak were absent more frequently.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

The Gambia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, The Gambia’s laws do not meet international standards on minimum age for work as the compulsory education age of 16 is lower than the minimum age for work at 18.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Articles 2 and 54 of the Labor Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Articles 2 and 44 of the Children’s Act; Articles 55 and 59 of the Labor Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 42, 44, and 45 of the Children’s Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Article 20 of the Constitution; Articles 2, 39–41, 47, and 58 of the Children’s Act; Articles 2 and 28 of the Trafficking in Persons Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 2, 30, and 39 of the Children’s Act; Articles 2, 28, 29, 38(c), and 56 of the Trafficking in Persons Act; Article 13 of the Tourism Offenses Act
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 26, 29–32, and 34 of the Children’s Act; Articles 7–9 of the Tourism Offenses Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 31 and 37 of the Children’s Act
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 59 of the Children’s Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 59 of the Children’s Act

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

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Article 31(c) of the Children’s Act
Compulsory Education Age, <b>16 Years</b> ‡		Article 18 of the Children’s Act
Free Public Education		Article 30 of the Constitution; Article 18 of the Children’s Act

‡ Age calculated based on available information.

The Gambia permits children as young as age 16 to engage in light work, and children as young as age 12 to work as a child apprentice in the informal sector. While the Children’s Act generally prohibits children from working in conditions that would be harmful to their health, education, or development, the Act does not determine the activities in which light work or apprenticeships may be permitted, prescribe the number of hours per week for light work or apprenticeships, or specify the conditions in which light work or apprenticeships may be undertaken. The Children’s Act provides for compulsory basic education. However, the law does not explicitly specify at what age basic education begins or how many years basic education lasts. In addition, while children in The Gambia are required to attend school up to age 16 based on current policy, this standard makes children ages 16 through 18 vulnerable to child labor, as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work.



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in The Gambia took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human and financial resource allocation hindered enforcement efforts.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Department of Labor:** Receives complaints about child labor. Conducts labor inspections in the formal sector, mediates disputes between employers and labor representatives, and refers serious cases to the labor courts and the Industrial Tribunal. The Inspectorate Unit is understaffed and lacks resources such as vehicles that inhibit carrying out routine inspections.

**Children’s Court:** Adjudicates criminal, civil, and care and protection cases involving children. Coordinates with social welfare officers from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) for the referral and care of children. Research did not find information on whether the Children’s Court took actions to address child labor during the reporting period.

**Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts**

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

It is **unknown** how many labor inspectors conducted worksite inspections, or whether child labor violations were found. It is also **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

<p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>The Gambia established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, it is unknown whether the coordinating mechanism was active and carried out activities during the reporting period.</p>	<p><b>National Coordination Committee on Child Labor:</b> Coordinates child labor enforcement processes, including prosecutions of the worst forms of child labor. Led by DSW and supported by UNICEF, comprises representatives from Department of Labor, UNICEF, DSW, National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons (NAATIP), Action Aid, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, Gambia Teachers Union, Young People in the Media, and the Inspector General of Police.</p>
<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>The Gambia established policies related to child labor. However, not all policies were active during the reporting period.</p> <p>‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</p>	<p><b>National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons (2021–2025):</b> Directs governmental efforts to address human trafficking. Includes strategies to improve legal framework, training of law enforcement and social services personnel, prevention and awareness, and protection for human trafficking survivors. During the reporting period, NAATIP took steps to implement the plan, including establishing a National Hotline for Victims of Trafficking.</p> <p><b>Regional Memoranda of Understanding (MoU):</b> Includes MoUs with both Senegal and Nigeria to coordinate efforts to address human trafficking. The MoU with Senegal commits both countries to information sharing; improved anti-trafficking in persons laws; and prevention, protection, and assistance activities. In 2023, The Gambia signed a new MoU with Nigeria and launched a technical working group to address human trafficking, including commitments to share information, to conduct joint investigations, the coordination of reintegration for victims, and a new approach in judicial cooperation.</p> <p><b>Code of Conduct of The Gambia Tourism Authority for the Protection of Children:</b> Raises awareness of commercial sexual exploitation of children in the tourism industry and among tourists. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Code of Conduct of The Gambia Tourism Authority for the Protection of Children during the reporting period.</p>
<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>The Gambia funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these programs do not fully address all worst forms of child labor.</p> <p>* Program was launched during the reporting period.          † Program is funded by the Government of The Gambia.          ‡ The government had other programs that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.</p>	<p><b>Blue Heart Campaign:</b>†* NAATIP program, in partnership with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, to provide support for trafficking in persons survivors, including children. Launched in July 2023 and provided training to police inspectors and social and health workers on identification, assistance, and referrals for survivors.</p> <p><b>Conditional Cash Transfers to Islamic Religious Schools (Majaalis):</b>‡ Ministry of Education program in partnership with the Institute for Social Reformation, an Islamic NGO based in The Gambia, that gives Koranic schools approximately \$2 monthly for each student if Koranic teachers do not force students to beg. Provides curriculum standards to Islamic schools. Each month, a joint team of ministry officials and Institute for Social Reformation and Action representatives travels to each Koranic school participating in the program. Research was unable to determine whether the program was in operation during the reporting period.</p> <p><b>Government-Run Shelters and “One-Stop” Centers:</b>‡ Includes DSW-run shelter, which has a 50-person capacity, supports vulnerable persons including trafficking survivors and children at risk of trafficking. During the reporting period, more “one-stop” centers were established.</p>

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)