

# GUINEA-BISSAU

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Guinea-Bissau made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Interministerial Commission to Fight Child Labor distributed tablets to all law enforcement agencies for the purpose of collecting child labor and human trafficking data. The Commission also provided training to relevant technicians on the management of human trafficking cases, distributed food and clothes to shelters, and conducted awareness-raising campaigns on human trafficking and forced child labor throughout communities. In collaboration with the United Nations World Food Program, the government also increased educational access to over 170,000 students throughout 693 schools, ensuring school meals reached children across all regions in the country, and provided additional rations to school-aged girls and to children with disabilities. However, prohibitions against the commercial sexual exploitation of children do not meet international standards since the prostitution of children is not criminally prohibited. In addition, minimum age protections for work only apply to children with a formal employment contract, which does not comply with international standards that require all children to be protected. Finally, since basic education is free only through the sixth grade, children in grades seven through nine are left without access to free basic education.



## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	18.8% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	97.6%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	20.6%

Children in Guinea-Bissau are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging. Children also engage in child labor in agriculture.

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



#### Agriculture

Farming and fishing.



#### Industry

Construction.



#### Services

Domestic work. Street work, including shoe-shining and vending. Also working as mechanics, including maintaining and repairing automobiles. Working in nightclubs,† including washing dishes and custodial work.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Forced labor in domestic work, agriculture, mining, and street work, including begging. Commercial sexual exploitation, 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 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 Guinea-Bissau’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### **Legal Framework**

Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to all children, including children without a formal employment agreement.

Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the use of a child for prostitution.

Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

Ensure that all nine years of basic education are free.

Increase the compulsory education age from 15 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.

### **Enforcement**

Ensure that the number of law enforcement officials is sufficient to address the scope of the problem, and that both law and criminal enforcement officials receive adequate resources to inspect, investigate, and prosecute cases of child labor throughout the country, including in Bafatá and Gabú, where child labor is known to occur.

Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating routine inspections and targeting inspections based on the analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents.

Publish information on labor enforcement data for the reporting period, including whether worksite inspections were routinely conducted, and whether penalties were imposed for child labor violations and the worst forms of child labor crimes.

### **Government Policies**

Ensure that a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, like the National Policy for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, is approved.

Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the National Emergency Plan for the Prevention and Combat of Trafficking in Persons and publish results from activities conducted during the reporting period.

### **Social Programs**

Ensure that facilities, including shelters, have adequate resources to assist victims of the worst forms of child labor.

Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem, including in agriculture and street work, particularly begging.

Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children by improving school infrastructure and providing transportation, particularly in rural areas.



## **CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK**

Koranic students, known as *talibés*, from the eastern region of the country, such as Bafatá and Gabú, are particularly vulnerable to being exploited for forced begging by corrupt Koranic school teachers and organized networks of human traffickers affiliated with Koranic schools. Furthermore, human trafficking networks take advantage of the country’s weak institutions and porous borders to transport large numbers of Bissau-Guinean boys to Senegal, and, to a lesser extent, to The Gambia, Guinea, and Mali, to beg on the streets for money and food.



## **BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS**

Inadequate school infrastructure and long distances to schools, particularly in rural areas, contribute to children’s barriers to accessing education in Guinea-Bissau.



## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Guinea-Bissau has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Guinea-Bissau’s laws on the minimum work age or the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation do not meet international standards.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>16 Years</b>		Articles 1, 3, 288, 347, 350, and 520 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Articles 354 and 355 of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 354 and 355 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 2–4 and 15 of the Law to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking; Article 106 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 2–4 and 15 of the Law to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 3–5 and 15 of the Law to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking; Articles 134 and 136 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 3 and 7 of the Decree on Narcotic Substances
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>17 Years</b>		Article 31 of Law No. 4/99
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 2 of Law No. 4/99
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, <b>15 Years</b> ‡		Articles 12 and 13 of the Education System Law
Free Public Education		Article 12(2) of the Education System Law

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The law’s minimum age protections do not apply to children working outside formal employment relationships, which is not in compliance with international standards that require all children to be protected by the law. In addition, the law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation because the use of children in prostitution is not criminally prohibited. Although the Education System Law states that basic education is compulsory and lasts 9 years, it makes basic education free only through grade six, leaving children in grades seven through nine without access to free basic education. Moreover, as the minimum age for work is 16, children aged 15 are vulnerable to exploitative child labor because they are not required to attend school while also not legally permitted to work.



## ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Guinea-Bissau took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient allocation of financial and human resources hindered enforcement efforts.

### Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

**Ministry of Public Administration, Labor, Employment and Social Security:** Enforces child labor legislation in collaboration with the Ministries of the Interior and Justice, and the National Institute for Women and Children (IMC).

**Ministry of the Interior’s Public Order Police and National Guard:** Enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, and refer relevant cases to IMC and NGOs for referral to social services providers. Through its Women and Children Brigade, investigates cases involving the worst forms of child labor, apart from child trafficking, and refers these to the IMC and NGOs. The Brigade comprises 10 officers.

### 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	Unknown	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, 22 labor inspectors conducted an unknown number of worksite inspections, finding an unknown number of child labor violations. In addition, the government also conducted 56 investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated 3 prosecutions, and did not convict any perpetrators.



### ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

<p><b>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</b></p> <p>Guinea-Bissau established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p><b>Interministerial Commission to Fight Child Labor:</b> Coordinates the government’s efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor. Led by the IMC. In 2023, the Commission distributed tablets to all interministerial agencies for the purpose of collecting child labor and human trafficking data. The Commission also provided training to relevant technicians on the management of human trafficking cases, distributed food and clothes to shelters, and conducted awareness-raising campaigns on human trafficking and forced child labor throughout communities.</p>
<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>Guinea-Bissau established policies related to child labor. However, lack of implementation of these policies hindered efforts to address the worst forms of child labor, including forced child begging.</p>	<p><b>National Policy for the Protection of Children (2021–2032):</b> Guides the government’s policies for addressing violence toward children, including the worst forms of child labor. Although the policy has yet to be approved by Parliament, NGOs, law enforcement agencies, and institutions working on child protection issues are already implementing its outlined procedures.</p> <p><b>National Emergency Plan for the Prevention and Combat of Trafficking in Persons:</b> Aims to prevent and reduce human trafficking by strengthening legislation, coordinate actions and initiatives among government agencies, promote the coordination and collaboration of relevant stakeholders, and improve protective services and assistance to victims. Led by the IMC with the collaboration of national and international NGOs and relevant government entities.</p> <p><b>Code of Conduct Against Sexual Exploitation in Tourism:</b> Seeks to raise awareness of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child trafficking in Guinea-Bissau, including in the Bijagós Archipelago, Bubaque, São Domingos, and Bissau regions. In 2023, the Ministry of Women, Family and Social Solidarity conducted human trafficking awareness-raising activities through radio campaigns and mural displays featuring trafficking in persons awareness messages.</p>

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

**Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Guinea-Bissau funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating and preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the full scope of the problem in all sectors where child labor has been identified, including in agriculture and street work, particularly begging.

*† Program is funded by the Government of Guinea-Bissau.*

**Friends of the Child Association Shelters (Associação dos Amigos da Criança):** † Donor-funded shelters, with government support, in Bissau and Gabú. Operated by a national NGO providing social services to vulnerable children, including victims of the worst forms of child labor. In 2023, repatriated 179 *talibés* (Koranic school students) to Guinea-Bissau from other countries, predominantly Senegal.

**UN World Food Program:** † School meals program reaching children in all regions of the country, with the aim of universal coverage by 2027. Also provides rations to school-aged girls and children with disabilities. In May 2023, a pilot program was launched to create vegetable gardens in schools for children with special needs. The UN Guinea-Bissau annual report, published during the reporting period, indicates an increase of education access to over 170,000 students throughout 693 schools in the country.

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)