

# MALDIVES

## MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Maldives made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government amended the General Regulation on the Child Rights Protection Act to include both the types of work that are prohibited for children and those that are allowed under supervision and for training purposes. It also increased the number of labor inspectors from 32 to 52. In addition, the Anti-Trafficking Unit, in collaboration with the Maldives Police Service and Maldives Immigration, conducted a number of human trafficking awareness-raising workshops. However, information on children's work is limited because a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. Laws in Maldives also do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited. In addition, Maldives lacks a policy to address all relevant forms of child labor and forced child labor in the country, including domestic work and drug trafficking.



## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	3.9% (2,364)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	79.5%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	4.0%

Children in Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, forced labor in domestic work, and use in illicit activities. Children also engage in child labor in domestic work.

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



#### Services

Domestic work.



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

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced labor in domestic work. Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs.

<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 Maldives's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

### Legal Framework

Ensure that laws prohibiting forced labor criminalize slavery.

Criminally prohibit all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including procuring, offering, and using children for pornographic performances.

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

Ensure that laws prohibiting child trafficking do not require the use of force, fraud, or coercion.

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

Provide labor inspectors with training on child labor issues.

Ensure that the Labor Relations Authority has institutional independence from the Ministry of Economic Development to fulfill its mandate and is not subject to influence from politicians.

Provide investigators with sufficient resources, including transportation and adequate number of staff, to investigate crimes related to the worst forms of child labor.

Ensure that law enforcement officials, prosecutors, and judges receive training on the appropriate handling of child labor, sex trafficking, and sexual abuse cases, as well as the proper application of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act to cases.

Impose penalties on individuals who are convicted of child labor crimes.

Investigate and prosecute government officials for their involvement in the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

**Coordination**

Establish coordinating mechanisms to prevent and eliminate all of the worst forms of child labor, including the use of children for domestic work and drug trafficking.

**Government Policies**

Adopt a policy to address all relevant forms of child labor and forced child labor, including domestic work and drug trafficking.

Ensure that adequate standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral, as well as the provision of needed victim services, are developed and effectively implemented.

Approve and implement a new National Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan.

**Social Programs**

Conduct and publish a national child labor survey that includes both Maldivian and migrant children.

Improve access to secondary education, particularly for girls, by ensuring adequate resources, secondary schools, and number of teachers, including for students with disabilities.

Publish information about activities undertaken to implement social programs, including activities carried out by the Family and Children's Service Centers.

Implement and provide sufficient resources for programs that address the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, and forced labor in domestic work.

Establish a permanent dedicated shelter for survivors of human trafficking.

**CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK**









Children of undocumented migrants from neighboring countries like Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, are especially vulnerable to labor and sex trafficking. Reports indicate that children from Bangladesh who enter the country on work visas and falsified passports have been targeted for labor trafficking. In addition, Maldivian children from sparsely populated atolls are also vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Children living in the outer islands often migrate to the capital city of Malé for better opportunities in education, sometimes without their parents. Reports indicate that children migrating for educational opportunities have been targeted by gangs to carry out illicit activities like drug trafficking. Maldivian children from the outer islands are also brought to the capital for domestic work. Once there, some of these children may be more vulnerable to labor or sex trafficking.

## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS




The right to free primary and secondary education is provided to all children in Maldives; however, there is a shortage of trained teachers and classrooms, as well as of teachers and resources for students with disabilities. In addition, some families have difficulty paying for required school materials. Certain practices in schools, such as coeducational classrooms and music played in schools, are seen by some families as contradictory to their religious beliefs, making it difficult for these children to attend school. Girls are less likely to be enrolled in lower secondary education than boys, increasing their risk for child labor.

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Maldives has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Maldives's laws do not meet international standards on the prohibition of commercial sexual exploitation of children because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited. Maldives's laws on child trafficking also do not meet international standards because they require the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the crime of child trafficking to have occurred.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>16 Years</b>		Sections 6 and 12 of the Employment Act; Article 26 of the Child Rights Protection Act; Section 8 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Sections 7 and 12 of the Employment Act
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Section 10 of the General Regulation on Child Rights Protection
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Section 3 of the Employment Act; Sections 10–14, 16–18, 21, and 25 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 3–8 and 11 of the 2nd Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Article 25 of the Constitution; Sections 26 and 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Sections 10–14, 17–18, and 21 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act; Sections 3–8 and 11 of the 2nd Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Sections 17–19 of the Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders; Sections 11 and 123 of the Child Rights Protection Act; Sections 13, 14, 17, 18, and 21 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, Sections 4–8 and 11 of the 2nd Amendment to the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Section 133(c)(1) of the Drugs Act; Article 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Legislation title unknown
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	

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

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, <b>16 Years</b>		Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 14 of the Education Act; Section 21 of the Child Rights Protection Act
Free Public Education		Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children; Articles 17–20 of the Education Act

\*Country has no conscription

In January 2023, the government enacted an amendment to a provision of the Child Rights Protection Act to specify the types of work children are prohibited from and permitted to engage in under supervision and for training purposes. However, the laws prohibiting forced labor in Maldives are not sufficient overall as they do not criminalize slavery. Laws prohibiting child trafficking are also insufficient because they require the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the crime of child trafficking to have occurred. Moreover, laws in Maldives do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited.



**ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR**

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient financial resource allocation hindered enforcement efforts. Local NGOs have also reported that the Labor Relations Authority lacks the institutional independence from the Ministry of Economic Development to fulfill its mandate.

**Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

**Labor Relations Authority, Ministry of Higher Education, Labor and Skills Development:** Conducts labor inspections and issues fines for violations in accordance with the Employment Act. All labor inspections look for child labor violations related to minimum age requirements as well as forced labor and hazardous work, but there are no officers dedicated to child labor issues. Penalties can be assessed during or after inspections but are not applied during initial inspections. If violations are identified, a timeline is given to rectify violations. Follow-up inspections are then conducted to check compliance with the recommendations of the Labor Relations Authority. Penalties are imposed in the event of noncompliance. If the Labor Relations Authority identifies a child employed in violation of child labor laws during inspections, a referral letter is sent via government intranet to the Child and Family Protection Service, which then takes over the case. Inspections are carried out based on a schedule published at the beginning of every year, with a focus on sectors and establishments that employ large numbers of employees and on establishments that have a history of cases filed with the Labor Relations Authority.

**Maldives Police Service:** The Family and Child Protection Department investigates complaints of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Refers cases to the Prosecutor General’s Office for prosecution and to the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services to provide survivor services. The police’s Anti-Human Trafficking Department investigates human trafficking-related offenses and enforces laws prohibiting trafficking in persons, including cases of child trafficking. In cases regarding child exploitation or trafficking, a victim support officer from the Prosecutor General Office’s Witness and Victims Support Service Unit and a prosecutor will join the case to identify imminent threats or probable risks and ensure the safety of the child survivor.

## 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	Yes
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	No

In 2023, **52** labor inspectors conducted **928** worksite inspections, finding **21** child labor violations. The government also conducted **72** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor and initiated **72** prosecutions.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

### Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Maldives established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, it lacks a coordination body to cover all forms of child labor in the country, including domestic service.

**National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee (NAHTSC):** Overseen by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office (ATO) and composed of senior government officials and civil society organization (CSO) representatives. NAHTSC is the lead interagency body responsible for coordinating the government's efforts to combat human trafficking and is responsible for organizing meetings and sharing information on human trafficking with its members. ATO is mandated to implement actions under the National Action Plan in collaboration with NAHTSC. Such actions include running a survivor's shelter, raising awareness, conducting baseline studies, and working with relevant authorities to provide protection and services to survivors of human trafficking. In 2023, ATO continued to offer shelter facilities to trafficking survivors, including children, and provided healthcare services, basic necessities, psychological support, translators, and legal support. In addition, the government began a process to assess which government agencies and CSO representatives should be part of the committee; this selection awaits approval by the President's Office.

### Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Maldives established a policy related to child labor. However, not all of the country's child labor issues are covered by the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan, including the use of children in domestic work and drug trafficking.

**Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan:** Aims to address human trafficking, including of children, by creating institutions, coordinating activities, raising awareness, and building capacity. The Anti-Trafficking Office drafted an updated version of the action plan during the reporting period and is currently awaiting further review and approval by NAHTSC.

### Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Maldives funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs do not cover all worst forms of child labor in the country, including the use of children for commercial sexual exploitation, drug trafficking, or forced labor in domestic work.

**Family and Children's Service Centers:**† Nineteen Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services-operated centers that provide psychosocial support for child survivors of abuse and exploitation, four of which provide temporary shelter. These centers remained open during the reporting period.

**Child Helpline (Number 1412):**† A 24/7 toll-free hotline run by the Labor Relations Authority through which cases of child exploitation and violations of the Employment Act can be reported. In 2023, the Child Helpline received 12,068 calls and provided training to helpline staff on identifying child labor.

**National Victim Support Hotline (Number 1696):**† A 24-hour hotline dedicated to receiving reports of human trafficking and child labor operated by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Office. In 2023, the government continued to operate the hotline.

† Program is funded by the Government of Maldives.

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)