

MALI

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – Efforts Made but Continued Practice that Delayed Advancement

In 2023, Mali made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The transition government enacted a new constitution that set the goal of prohibiting slavery, trafficking in persons, and the forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. It also enacted a new Anti-Trafficking in Persons National Action Plan. However, despite these initiatives to address child labor, Mali is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because the transition government continued to use children in its armed forces and police in violation of national and international law. In addition, Malian law does not explicitly prohibit the use of children for illicit activities and allows children under the age of 18 to be penalized for acts they were forced to commit as a direct result of being recruited and used by armed groups. The government also lacks a policy to address all worst forms of child labor that exist in the country, and social and rehabilitation services to assist survivors of child labor remain inadequate.

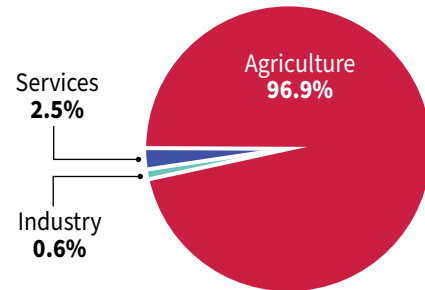


PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	30.4% (1,891,233)
Attending School	5 to 14	50.1%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	19.1%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



Children in Mali are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in hereditary slavery, forced begging, and in armed conflict. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, particularly in the production of cotton and rice. In addition, children participate in artisanal gold mining and the Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA) used children in its forces during the reporting period.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Cultivating,† harvesting,† ginning,† processing, transporting,† and applying chemical fertilizers and pesticides,† particularly in the production of cotton and rice. Cutting and collecting trees and hay. Also raising livestock† and fishing,† including collecting fish, throwing nets, and piloting small boats.



Industry

Working in artisanal gold mining,† including working with mercury.† Also working in quarrying,† construction,† and assembling of fishing canoes.†



Services

Domestic work† and street work,† including market vending,† begging,† and performing tasks in the

transportation sector. Use of voluntarily recruited children used in hostilities by state armed groups.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Forced labor in artisanal mining, domestic work, street work, and farming, including in the production of rice. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Hereditary slavery. Forced begging by Koranic teachers. Use in illicit activities, including in the trafficking of drugs, and forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict.

† 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.

In 2023, the Armed Forces of Mali (FAMA), as well as the gendarmerie and police recruited and used children in its forces. The transition government detained 14 children during operations and held five. Non-state armed groups also forcibly recruited and used children as combatants and for forced labor at some artisanal gold mines under their control in northern Mali.



SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Mali's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Guarantee free basic education to all children in Mali, including non-citizens.

Establish a minimum age no younger than age 13 for light work and specify the conditions under which light work may be undertaken, in accordance with international standards.

Criminally prohibit the use, procurement, or offering of children for illicit activities, including for the production and trafficking of drugs; and the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups for use in any armed conflict.

Revise the Interministerial Circular on the Prevention, Protection, and Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers to include the specific ages of children covered by the Circular, while ensuring that these ages are in compliance with international standards, and do not penalize children for acts committed as a result of being forcibly recruited into armed groups or used in armed conflict.

Enforcement

Increase the number of labor inspectors to 162 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 6.5 million workers.

Collect child labor statistics regularly and create a centralized database to track data on the worst forms of child labor.

Provide adequate funding to labor law enforcement agencies and publish information on their efforts, including the number of child labor violations found and the number of inspections conducted at the worksite.

Publish information on criminal law enforcement, including whether new criminal investigators received initial training and whether refresher courses were provided, the number of investigations, violations found, and prosecutions initiated, and whether penalties for violations of the worst forms of child labor were imposed.

Implement the provisions of the Interministerial Circular and the UN-signed Protocol, which require that children in detention for their association with armed groups be transferred to social services or to UN child protection agencies for appropriate reintegration and social protection services.

Ensure that government officials are held accountable for interference in legal cases related to crimes concerning the worst forms of child labor, including in cases of slavery and the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Prosecute and convict perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor in accordance with the law.

Ensure that children under age 18 are not recruited into or used in the national armed forces, in compliance with national law; that all children currently serving in the national armed forces are demobilized; that children are not imprisoned due to association with armed groups; and that appropriate social services are provided to survivors.

Coordination

Clarify roles for the coordinating mechanisms addressing child labor and improve coordination among relevant agencies.

Government Policies

Adopt a national policy that addresses all forms of child labor that are prevalent in Mali.

Implement the Interministerial Circular and the Protocol on the Release and Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Groups and Armed Forces and publish results from activities implemented on an annual basis.

Social Programs

Implement key social programs to address child labor, make information about implementation measures publicly available on an annual basis, and institute new programs to address child labor in all relevant sectors, including domestic work, forced begging, and commercial sexual exploitation.

Expand the Child Travel Card Program, which provides identification to Malian children when they are traveling within and outside of the country, to cover children with foreign citizenship.

Make education accessible for all children, including girls and those living in conflict-affected areas, by removing school-related fees, expanding school infrastructure, increasing teacher availability, providing free school supplies, taking measures to ensure the safety of children and teachers in schools, and increasing birth registration rates to ensure that children have access to social services, including education.

Ensure that government social services have sufficient resources and facilities to provide the necessary care for survivors of the worst forms of child labor, including for children subjected to forced begging and children used in armed conflict.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children, especially from the Bellah community, are subjected to hereditary slavery in northern and southwestern Mali. Some children are born into slavery, while others are born free but remain in dependent status. As a result, these children, along with their parents, are forced to work for their parents’ former masters in exchange for food, money, and lodging. Enslaved children perform agricultural or domestic labor and are often sexually abused. In addition, research indicates that children were abducted from Timbuktu and Gossi to be used for exploitation in slavery during the reporting period. Children, particularly those of Songhai ethnicity, also work in debt bondage in the northern salt mines of Taoudenni. Moreover, at least 45,753 children in the north, south, and west are also involved in artisanal gold mining, during which they are exposed to toxic substances and extreme temperatures, transport heavy loads of water and minerals, and work long hours. Around mining sites, children also are victims of commercial sexual exploitation and domestic servitude and are involved in trafficking narcotics. Many of the children working in mines are from neighboring countries in the region. Some boys, including from neighboring countries, are placed in the care of Koranic teachers for education and forced by their teachers to beg on the street or work in fields, after which they must surrender their earnings.



BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

The Constitution guarantees free and compulsory education for citizens; however, many children, especially girls, do not attend school because parents are expected to pay fees for registration, uniforms, transportation costs, and supplies, as well as teachers’ additional salary payments, all of which are cost-prohibitive for many impoverished families. Long distances between villages and schools, and lack of schools, classes, and teachers, are also significant barriers to education. In addition, many children in Mali are not registered at birth, which may prevent them from accessing services such as education. Research indicates that there are hundreds of thousands of children in Mali without birth certificates, and that while lack of documentation does not exclude children from schooling, these students may not be allowed to take national exams. Evidence also suggests that incidences of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, including corporal punishment, prevent some children from remaining in school. Furthermore, internally displaced children faced interruptions in their education and barriers to enrolling in school after fleeing their homes. By January 2024, ongoing insecurity and attacks on schools have resulted in as many as 1,657 school closures.










LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Mali has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Mali’s laws do not meet international standards on the prohibition of debt bondage, slavery, forced labor, or using children in illicit activities because these actions are not fully criminalized.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Article 326 of the Labor Code; Article L.187 of the Law 2017-021 modifying the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Hazardous Occupations List; Article 1 of the 2017-4388 Amendment to Hazardous Occupations List; Articles 326 and D.189.14 of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Hazardous Occupations List; Article 1 of the 2017-4388 Amendment to Hazardous Occupations List; Article 189 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Article 4 of the 2023 Constitution; Article L.6 of the Law 2017-021 modifying the Labor Code; Articles 1 and 11 of the Trafficking in Persons Law
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Article 244 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 7 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 63 of the Child Protection Code

Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Article 228 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 7 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 57 of the Child Protection Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Article 183 of the Penal Code; Articles 18 and 50 of the Child Protection Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 17 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 31.23 and 31.31 of the Penal Code; Article 5 of the Military General Statute
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		Article 17 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 31.23 and 31.31 of the Penal Code; Article 5 of the Military General Statute
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Articles 31.23, 31.31, and 32 of the Penal Code
Compulsory Education Age, 15 Years ‡		Articles 26 and 34 of the Law of Education
Free Public Education		Article 11 of the 2023 Constitution; Article 4 of the Law of Education

‡ Age calculated based on available information

In July 2023, the transition government enacted a new constitution that sets the goal of prohibiting slavery, trafficking in persons, and the forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups. Despite this effort, and although Mali’s Trafficking in Persons Law criminalizes the act of slavery, including human trafficking for the purpose of slavery, Mali’s Labor Code, while prohibiting forced labor generally, does not specifically prohibit hereditary slavery. In addition, Malian law does not prohibit using, procuring, or offering a child for the production and trafficking of drugs as established by international standards. While the Child Protection Code provides some protections for children under age 18, and the Penal Code establishes criminal penalties for several forms of child labor, some offenses included in the Child Protection Code do not carry criminal penalties, such as the prohibition of child recruitment by non-state armed groups. Moreover, although the Child Protection Code prohibits children under age 18 from participating in armed conflicts or joining the national armed forces, it only prescribes prison sentences for those who commit repeat offenses. Meanwhile, the Penal Code only provides criminal penalties for child recruitment if the children recruited are under age 15, rendering 16- and 17-year-olds unprotected. Article 28 of the Penal Code states that crimes committed out of self-defense or under a force that could not be resisted should not be penalized as prescribed in other articles of the Penal Code. Although a 2013 Interministerial Circular on the Prevention, Protection, and Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers states that Article 28 of the Penal Code is applicable to children involved in armed conflict, the Circular does not define the age range of the children it covers. This means that some children under age 18 who are affiliated with non-state armed groups may be penalized for crimes they were forced to commit as a direct result of being a victim of child labor.

The Education Law formally guarantees the right of education only for citizens, potentially making it difficult for non-citizen children to enroll in school. Articles 189.35 and 189.36 of the Labor Code allow children between the ages of 12 and 14 to perform domestic or light seasonal work, as long as it does not impede school attendance or exceed 4.5 hours of work per day. However, Mali’s light work framework does not meet international standards because it applies to children under the age of 13 and does not specify the conditions under which light work may be undertaken.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

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

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor, Civil Service and Social Dialogue (MOL): Investigates Labor Code infractions, including those regarding child labor. Chairs the National Unit to Fight Against Child Labor (CNLTE), which coordinates Mali’s efforts to eliminate child labor and includes representatives from other government ministries, civil society, and worker and employer organizations. One labor inspector in each region is designated as the point of contact for CNLTE staff to facilitate regional coordination.

Ministry of Justice’s Special Judicial Office and Specialized Investigation Brigade: Functions within the National Police and enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor.

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

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>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>Mali established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, this mechanism lacks the financial resources necessary to carry out its mandate.</p>	<p>National Committee to Track Child Labor (CDN): Functions under MOL and acts as the main coordinating body for the elimination of child labor in Mali. Composed of several ministries, NGOs, business organizations, and trade unions. During the reporting period, the CDN held regular meetings but activities to address child labor did not take place due to budgetary constraints.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Mali established policies related to child labor. However, the country lacks a policy that covers all worst forms of child labor.</p> <p><i>† Policy was approved during the reporting period.</i></p>	<p>Anti-Trafficking in Persons National Action Plan (2023–2027):† Led by the Ministry of Justice, contains provisions for prevention, protection of victims, prosecution of perpetrators, and coordination.</p> <p>Interministerial Circular and the Protocol on the Release and Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Groups and Armed Forces: Provides a framework that highlights the responsibility of the government to prevent children’s involvement in armed conflict, and to protect and reintegrate those children who become involved. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement these policies during the reporting period.</p>

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>Mali funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors where child labor has been identified, including in domestic work, forced begging, and commercial sexual exploitation.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the transition Government of Mali.</i></p>	<p>Child Travel Card Program:[†] Program overseen by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family’s (MPFEF) Directorate for the Promotion of Children and Family (DPCF). The Child Travel Card Program (<i>Titre de Voyage pour Enfant</i>) is carried out as part of the Directorate’s efforts to address child trafficking by facilitating proper identification of children traveling within and outside Mali. Failure to show a child travel card prompts follow-up actions to confirm whether the child is a victim of human trafficking. Research indicates that this program does not cover foreign citizen children.</p> <p>Program to Support Children in Armed Conflict:[†] Program overseen by the MPFEF’s Interministerial Committee to Prevent Grave Violations Against Children that carries out awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, implements reintegration programs for former child soldiers, and conducts joint missions with international partners to determine the presence of children in armed conflict. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the programs during the reporting period.</p>
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For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit dol.gov/ILABprojects
 For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports