

SURINAME

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, Suriname made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government signed the Third Decent Country Work Program with the International Labor Organization, which includes proactive strategies for the prevention and eradication of child labor. The Ministry of Labor also created a commission that evaluated the 2010 Decree on Hazardous Work for Youth and presented recommendations to update it. Additionally, a representative of the National Commission on Combating Child Labor took part in a regional conference in Peru at which countries shared best practices and agreed to collaborate on a series of activities to combat child labor. However, despite these efforts, the compulsory education age falls below the minimum age for employment, leaving some children vulnerable to labor exploitation. In addition, while Suriname's laws criminalize sexual acts with a minor under 16, they do not criminally prohibit the use of a child under the age of 16 for commercial sex. The government also did not report the number of child labor inspections it conducted in 2023.



PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	7.2% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	95.3%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	7.3%

Children in Suriname 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 gold mining.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity



Agriculture

Harvesting crops, including the use of dangerous equipment, carrying heavy loads,[†] and applying pesticides.[†] Forestry,[†] fishing, and hunting.



Industry

Gold mining,[†] including carrying heavy loads[†] and exposure to chemicals.[†] Construction[†] and wood processing.[†]



Services

Street work, including vending, domestic work, and airport luggage transportation.[†]



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor[‡]

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and use in illicit activities, including selling drugs.

[†] 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 Suriname’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Legal Framework

Increase the compulsory education age from age 12 to at least age 16, the minimum age for work.

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

Criminally prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children, including the use of a child under age 16 for prostitution.

Criminally prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.

Enforcement

Publish information on the Labor Inspectorate's budget and the number of worksite inspections conducted.

Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate and the Trafficking in Persons Unit of the Suriname Police Force are sufficiently funded and adequately staffed to cover labor inspections in both the formal and informal sectors of the labor force, including in risk-prone sectors, such as in fisheries, mining, and agricultural areas in which child labor is likely to occur, particularly in the interior of the country.

Ensure that there are sufficient resources, including for travel to the interior of the country, and inspectors to proactively investigate human trafficking cases.

Ensure that the child labor referral system can adequately provide long-term solutions, including housing, to child labor cases that are reported to it.

Government Policies

Ensure that the government policy to address child labor is approved by the government so it is able to carry out its intended mandates.

Social Programs

Develop social programs to prevent and eradicate child labor in agriculture and mining.

Strengthen specialized social services to assist child victims of human trafficking, including commercial sexual exploitation.

Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers to education, particularly for children in the interior, by eliminating school-related fees, reducing transportation costs, increasing access to schools in remote locations, improving teacher availability, removing requirements for documentation, and covering material missed during school closures.

Ensure that all children, including children of foreign-born parents, have access to free public education regardless of citizenship and residency status, and that school registration is not used to report families without proper residential status.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK












Children in migrant populations, especially those with irregular status residing in the country, are particularly vulnerable to both sex and labor trafficking due to challenges associated with their precarious legal status. Children in Suriname's remote interior are also subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, including in informal mining camps.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Although Suriname’s attendance percentage for primary school is high, it drops significantly for secondary school. Research indicates that there are disparities in education completion rates based on geographic and socioeconomic status, and that secondary school completion rates in the interior are as low as 15 percent. In 2023, schools in the interior did not open until months after schools in the coastal area had already reopened, with delays attributed to lack of facilities, teachers, and supplies, including water, as well as unpaid bills from flight companies that transport teachers to isolated villages. The delay in reopening schools has led to children seeking other activities, including employment in artisanal gold mining. Although children who are not citizens of Suriname can access free public education if they provide a birth certificate and vaccination records, children have been prohibited from accessing school due to a lack of proper paperwork. Migrant parents experience more problems in registering their children for school. Research suggests that families residing illegally in the country have also kept their children out of school to avoid being reported to authorities.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Suriname has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Suriname's laws do not meet international standards, including insufficient prohibitions related to the commercial sexual exploitation of children and a compulsory education age that is less than the minimum age for work.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 16 Years		Articles 1 (j–l), 3, and 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Articles 1 (k and l) and 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act; Article 1 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 2 and 3 of the Decree on Hazardous Labor for Youth; Article 11 of the Children and Young Persons Labor Act
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 334, 338, and 339 of the Penal Code; Article 15 of the Constitution; Article 1 the Children and Young Persons Labor Act
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Article 334 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 291, 293, 297, 298, 303a, and 306 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, 18 Years		Article 9 of the Conscription Act
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		
Compulsory Education Age, 12 Years		Article 39 of the Constitution; Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education
Free Public Education		Articles 38 and 39 of the Constitution

*Country has no conscription

Suriname's laws do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children because while it is criminal to have a sexual relationship with a child under the age of 16, the use of a child under age 16 for commercial sex is not criminally prohibited. In addition, while the Penal Code establishes penalties for the production and trafficking of drugs, it does not specifically prohibit the use, procuring, and offering of a child in the production and trafficking of drugs. Moreover, Article 20 of the Law on Basic Education requires children to attend school only until they are 12 years old. This makes children ages 12 to 16 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor because they are not legally required to attend school nor are they legally permitted to work.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Suriname took actions to address child labor. However, gaps exist within the operations of the agencies that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial resources.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor, Employment Opportunity and Youth Affairs (MOL): Enforces laws related to child labor through its Labor Inspectorate. Reports suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Unit of the Suriname Police Force within 45 minutes of identification. Leading up to the International Day Against Child Labor on June 12, 2023, MOL signed a commitment to accelerate the elimination of Child Labor by 2025 as outlined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 8.7.

Suriname Police Force: Enforces criminal laws related to child labor. Includes the Youth Affairs Police, which cover law enforcement involving children under age 18 and are responsible for child labor-related crimes. Also includes the TIP Unit, which investigates reports and allegations of human trafficking and forced sexual exploitation nationwide, including cases involving children, and closely collaborates with the Prosecutors' Office. In 2023, the TIP Unit held multiple awareness sessions on human trafficking for different audiences, including high schools, police officers, NGOs, and authorities working on Suriname's migration policy. Funding and resources are continuous challenges for the TIP Unit.

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	No
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	No

It is **unknown** how many labor inspectors conducted worksite inspections, or whether child labor violations were found. The government also conducted **2** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated **1** prosecution, and convicted **0** perpetrators.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>Suriname established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p>National Commission on Combating Child Labor (NCUK): Inter-departmental commission tasked with drafting and implementing legislation and policies to prevent and combat child labor. In 2023, NCUK met multiple times to discuss updating policies and legislation on child labor as well as proposed projects to prevent child labor. In addition, a member of NCUK took part in a regional conference in Peru at which countries shared best practices and agreed to collaborate on a series of activities to combat child labor. Members also met with visiting representatives of ILO to discuss potential funding opportunities for projects. NCUK's term expired in December 2023, and a proposal for extension has been forwarded to the government for approval.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>Suriname established policies related to child labor. However, the government has yet to approve needed updates.</p>	<p>National Action Plan to Combat Child Labor (2019–2024): Aims to remove children from child labor and address the root causes of child labor, including poverty and lack of educational opportunities. Recently updated to include regional activities and extend through 2025. However, the updated version still has to be approved by the government.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>Suriname 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 in which child labor has been identified, including in commercial sexual exploitation and mining.</p> <p><i>*Program was launched during the reporting period. † Program is funded by the Government of Suriname. ‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p>Decent Work Country Program:* ILO program that supports capacity building of the Labor Inspectorate and constituents, as well as the National Commission on Combating Child Labor for implementing the National Action Plan. In February 2023, Suriname and ILO signed the Third Decent Country Work Program, which includes proactive strategies for the prevention of child labor, sustainable eradication of child labor, and promotion of decent work. Includes a multi-step plan to address child labor through legislative reform, effective enforcement, and improved referral systems.</p> <p>My Line (Mi Lijn):† Government-run, 24-hour hotline that provides confidential advice to children in need, including victims of the worst forms of child labor, victims of domestic violence, and persons in need of mental support. The initiative continued to operate during the reporting period, with limited government support.</p> <p>Consolidating Access to Inclusive Quality Education in Suriname:‡ Government program, supported by the Inter-American Development Bank, that began an initiative with the goal of providing inclusive access to all levels of education in Suriname, with a specific focus on children in the interior and improving the quality of lower secondary education. In October 2023, held a 2-day seminar with the Ministry of Education for stakeholders on the state of the education system in Suriname to discuss ways in which the education sector can be adjusted to accommodate the needs of employers, while also developing the individual talents of students.</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