

In 2016, Cameroon made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government passed a new penal code, which incorporated elements of the 2011 Anti-Trafficking Law; launched a \$12 million Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program; and negotiated the identification and repatriation of 14 girls who were trafficked to Kuwait, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates for forced labor in domestic work. However, children in Cameroon perform dangerous tasks in cocoa production and engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. The Government has not ratified the UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, nor has it prohibited the use of children in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Cameroon perform dangerous tasks in cocoa production. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.(1-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Cameroon.

Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	56.2
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	79.7
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	52.7
Primary Completion Rate (%)		73.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(6)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children’s Work Project’s analysis of statistics from Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples, 2011.(7)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children’s work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of bananas, cocoa, coffee, onions, palm oil, rubber, and tea, including handling pesticides, machetes, clearing fields, climbing trees, and lifting heavy loads† (4, 5, 8-15) Raising livestock (4, 13) Fishing (4, 13, 16)
Industry	Working in <i>artisanal</i> gold mines† and gravel quarries,† transporting heavy loads† of sand or gravel, breaking stones, and digging or standing in stagnant water to extract minerals (3, 12, 13, 15-17) Construction, including carrying heavy loads† of water, concrete, cement, and bricks (12, 13, 15)
Services	Domestic work (4, 12, 13, 15, 18) Working in transportation (12, 13) Street work, including carrying heavy luggage,† vending, and begging (11-13, 15, 19-22)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2, 3, 13, 15, 20, 23-25) Forced recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including as suicide bombers and concubines (26-34) Forced labor in agriculture in the production of cocoa, cotton, onions, and tea; fishing; livestock raising; domestic work; spare parts shops; in <i>artisanal</i> gold mines and gravel quarries; street vending; and construction, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3, 13, 15, 25) Forced begging as <i>talibés</i> in Koranic schools (12, 35, 36)

† 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.

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Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking from neighboring countries in Central and West Africa.(3, 12, 22, 37) Some parents may entrust their children to intermediaries who pretend to offer education and employment opportunities but instead subject the child to forced domestic work as a result of internal human trafficking.(25, 29) However, improved public awareness about this type of child trafficking has reduced this practice, and perpetrators are increasingly resorting to kidnapping children for human trafficking purposes.(3) Enforcement officials are also becoming more vigilant about requiring parental authorization for children traveling without their parents, and border crossings are increasingly well monitored, particularly at the borders of Nigeria and the Central African Republic.(3)

Although Decree N° 2001/041 on the Organization of Public Schools guarantees free education in Cameroon, families are required to pay for uniforms, books, and other school-related fees.(11, 22, 38-42) A lack of schools and teachers in rural areas also hinders access to education.(19, 22, 40, 41, 43) In addition, children in refugee camps have difficulty accessing education due to a lack of school infrastructure, teachers, language barriers, and resources to pay for school-related expenses.(41, 44-47) Numerous attacks by *Boko Haram* have closed many schools in northern Cameroon, but some schools reopened for the 2016–2017 school year. Although the Government has dedicated \$8.7 million to reconstruct schools in the Far North region, some contractors and teachers are unwilling to work in areas affected by *Boko Haram*.(22, 27, 33, 34, 36, 39, 44, 45, 48-51) Teacher and student strikes in the Northwest and Southwest regions at the end of 2016 also disrupted students' access to education.(36, 52-54)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Cameroon has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Cameroon's legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Section 86 of the Labor Code; Article 2 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor (55, 56)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code (55, 56)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 9–23 of the Order on Child Labor (56)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 1–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Articles 11, 342-1, 352, and 353 of the Penal Code; Section 2 of the Labor Code (55, 57, 58)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 1–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Articles 11, 342-1, and 352–354 of the Penal Code (57, 58)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 294 and 344–347 of the Penal Code; Articles 76, 81, and 82 of the Law on Cybersecurity and Cybercriminality (57, 59)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	Yes*	18	Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers (60, 61)
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers (60, 61)
Non-state Compulsory	No		
Compulsory Education Age	No	12‡	Preamble of the Constitution; Articles 9 and 16 of the Law Orienting the Education System (57, 62-64)
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 46 (2), 47, and 48 of the Decree on the Organization of Public Schools (42)

* No conscription (65)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (39)

A new Penal Code was passed in July 2016, which includes a new provision punishing parents with a fine of \$80–\$800 if they choose not to enroll their children in school, despite having adequate means. The new Penal Code also incorporated the 2011 Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery.(57) However, the human trafficking provisions remain discordant with international standards, as they require threats, the use of force, or coercion to be established for the crime of child trafficking, and individuals ages 16 to 18 are not considered children.(57, 58) In addition, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children under age 18 are not comprehensive, as work under water or work at dangerous heights are not prohibited.(18, 56) The Government has acknowledged the need to update the hazardous work prohibitions and is planning to incorporate updates into a revision of the Labor Code.(11, 18)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MINTSS)	Lead efforts to enforce child labor laws, promote decent working conditions, and lead the National Committee to Combat Child Labor (CNLCTE).(11, 66, 67) Advocate on behalf of victims, present complaints to court, and provide social services to victims of child labor.(68)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Prosecute cases referred by the General Delegate for National Security (DGSN) or the Ministry of Defense's National Gendarmerie (SED) and contribute to investigations as appropriate.(13, 68)
Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS)	Lead efforts to combat human trafficking, provide social services and repatriation assistance to victims according to the National Referral System, and maintain a hotline for reporting child labor violations.(11, 13, 29, 69, 70) Through its Minors Brigade, work with local police stations to investigate child trafficking and the use of children in hazardous work.(8, 71, 72) Through its Joint Mobile Brigade, prevent and combat the phenomenon of street children through identification, reintegration, and education.(8, 73)
Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Family (MINPROFF)	Promote and protect the rights of the child, including by combating sex tourism and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.(11)
Ministry of Defense's National Gendarmerie (SED)	Enforce criminal laws against child trafficking and investigate violations of child labor laws in both rural and urban areas.(13, 73) Conduct initial investigations before referring cases to the MOJ or Ministry of Defense.(13)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
General Delegate for National Security (DGSN)	Enforce laws against the worst forms of child labor and investigate violations in urban areas.(13, 73) Through its Special Vice Squad, investigate cases of human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse against women and children through regional and international police cooperation.(13, 18) Refer cases to the MOJ or Ministry of Defense.(13)
Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization	Enforce child labor laws at the regional level. Local representatives may settle child labor disputes amicably or refer the case to the SED, DGSN, or MOJ for further investigation and prosecution.(73)

Although many agencies may be involved in the investigation and prosecution of a case, there is no official mandate requiring them to work together or hierarchically. In theory, this allows a greater number of cases to be addressed, but research was unable to determine whether this was the case.(13)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2016, labor law enforcement agencies in Cameroon took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown* (1)	\$635,610 (74)
Number of Labor Inspectors	79 (1)	80 (13)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (55)	Yes (55)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (1)	Yes (13)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	No (13)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (1)	Unknown (13)
Number of Labor Inspections	Unknown* (1)	Unknown* (13)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown* (1)	Unknown* (13)
Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown* (1)	Unknown* (13)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown* (1)	Unknown* (13)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown* (1)	Unknown* (13)
Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown* (1)	Unknown* (13)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (1)	Yes (13)
Routine Inspections Targeted	No (1)	Unknown (13)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (55)	Yes (13)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (1)	Yes (13)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (1, 75)	Yes (13)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (75)	Yes (13)

* The Government does not publish this information.

The number of labor inspectors is insufficient for the size of Cameroon's workforce, which includes over 9 million workers.(76) According to the ILO recommendation of 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in industrializing economies, Cameroon should employ roughly 607 labor inspectors.(76-78) The Labor Inspectorate lacked the necessary resources to carry out its mandate during the reporting period, and inspectors were tasked with reconciliation duties, which may detract from time devoted to their primary duties.(13, 39, 55) In addition, child labor violations are not specifically targeted during inspections because existing legislation does not explicitly extend to the informal sector in which the majority of child labor occurs.(13, 79) Although the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS), Interpol, and the police all maintain hotlines for reporting the worst forms of child labor, research was unable to determine how many cases of child labor were identified as a result of complaints made to these lines.(18, 75)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2016, criminal law enforcement agencies in Cameroon took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2015	2016
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (1)	Yes (13)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	No (13)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (1, 66)	No (13)
Number of Investigations	17 (66)	13 (29, 74)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown* (1)	119 (13, 74)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	20 (14)	9 (29, 80)
Number of Convictions	2 (66)	Unknown (29)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1, 20, 25)	Yes (13)

* The Government does not publish this information.

It is unclear how many investigators the Government employed in 2016, although officers from the National Police and National Gendarmerie, Special Vice Squad, and Cameroon Border Police all worked to enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. In general, these agencies do not receive adequate funding or training to investigate the worst forms of child labor, and high staff turnover is a challenge.(3, 13, 37, 39) As a result, the Government relies heavily on NGOs to bring child trafficking cases to its attention and provide services to victims.(3, 37) The Government acknowledges that a lack of awareness of child trafficking issues also prevents Cameroonian citizens from reporting offenses to enforcement agencies and that children may be afraid to speak against perpetrators in court.(29, 37) There are also some reports that the Government holds boys in detention for prolonged periods due to suspicion of being affiliated with *Boko Haram* elements.(28, 49, 50, 81, 82)

There are no comprehensive statistics on criminal child labor law violations, although two regional task forces and local NGOs reported at least five cases of child trafficking in 2016, some of which were settled outside the judicial system.(13) The Government prosecuted 11 cases related to human trafficking, nine of which involved children. These prosecutions resulted in seven convictions, but the Government did not disaggregate the convictions by cases involving minors.(74) Convictions in two cases of child trafficking initiated in the previous reporting period ultimately were prosecuted as other crimes. In one instance, a 14-year-old victim was punished for stealing a cow as compensation for forced labor, and in the other, a local mayor and five others were sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment and a fine of \$48,800 for kidnapping a 14-year-old girl.(29) Research indicates some government officials in the Northwest region were also investigated for complicity in a child trafficking ring during the reporting period.(29)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Committee to Combat Child Labor (CNLCCTE)	Coordinate government efforts to eradicate child labor by 2017, propose measures to harmonize Cameroon's legal framework to international standards, and implement the National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children (PANETEC).(67, 83, 84) Led by MINTSS.(67, 83)
Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC)	Coordinate government efforts to combat human trafficking; chaired by the Secretary General of the Office of the Prime Minister and includes members of eight ministries, law enforcement personnel, civil society organizations, and NGOs.(29, 37) Oversee two Regional Taskforces on Trafficking in Persons.(14, 29, 85)

The CNLCCTE and IMC failed to meet in 2016 due to a lack of funding, and the Regional Taskforces on Trafficking in Persons were ineffective during the reporting period.(29, 74) This severely hindered government efforts to coordinate and share relevant information between government offices and stakeholders in the NGO community.(36, 37)

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V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
PANETEC (2014–2016)	Aimed to eradicate the worst forms of child labor by 2016, including forced domestic work. Reinforced the Government’s institutional framework, including by harmonizing national laws with international standards, providing quality universal primary education, and allocating additional resources to the labor inspectorate.(11, 13, 86, 87)
Trafficking in Persons Action Plan (2014–2019)	Outlines efforts to combat human trafficking.(3)
MOJ’s National Action Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Cameroon (2015–2019)	Aims to combat exploitative child labor by disseminating standard operating procedures for the National Referral System, raising awareness about how to identify and report cases of child trafficking, increasing punishments for offenders, and building the capacity of labor inspectors.(13, 66, 88) Also aims to improve access to education for vulnerable groups by increasing the number of teachers and classrooms, establishing a legal framework to regulate parent–teacher associations, and increasing the rate of educational attainment for girls.(88)
Decent Work Country Program (2014–2017)	Incorporates child labor concerns into the strategy for work.(9)

The National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children (PANETEC) was endorsed by stakeholders in 2014, but the Government’s failure to formally endorse it limited its implementation.(13, 29, 89) Although routine activities carried out by various ministries may support policies related to child labor, no activities were undertaken to implement specific policies during the reporting period due to a lack of resources.(36) Furthermore, the Government has not included child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the PRSP (2010–2020), the UNICEF Country Program Action Plan (2013–2017), or the IMC’s National Gender Policy Document (2011–2020).(90-92)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor[†]

Program	Description
Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children (Project 559) [†]	MINAS-funded program that gathers information on street children and offers health care, education, and psychosocial care.(3, 39) In 2016, provided shelter to 92 children removed from Boko Haram elements, identified and provided reintegration or reinsertion services to 265 street children, and facilitated primary education for 5,250 indigenous Baka children.(13)
Country Program Action Plan (2013–2017) [†]	UNICEF- and MINAS-implemented program that aims to improve social protection and preventive health care, and to ensure access to primary education.(1, 71, 92) In 2016, provided psychosocial support, identification, and reintegration or reinsertion services to children displaced by Boko Haram elements in the Far North region.(13)
School Feeding Programs	Programs that provide meals to improve educational access for girls.(8, 38) The \$12 million U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program* improves literacy and nutrition in 92 primary schools, benefitting 40,000 children in the Northwest region.(13) In 2016, the WFP provided meals to 3,200 children in northern Cameroon but discontinued its program after May due to lack of funding.(93)
Social Safety Nets (2014–2018)	\$50 million World Bank-funded program implemented by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional Development that provides direct cash transfers to vulnerable families in exchange for commitments by parents to send their children to school.(38) By the end of 2016, provided cash transfer or cash for work to 208,203 individuals in the regions of Adamaoua, the Far North, North, and the cities of Douala and Yaoundé.(94, 95)

[†] Program is funded by the Government of Cameroon.

[‡] The Government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms.(3, 13, 20, 29, 66, 73)

Although the Government has implemented programs to assist victims of child trafficking and children engaged in street work and domestic work, the scope of these programs is insufficient and does not fully address the extent of the problem; in addition, funding

was reduced during the reporting period.(1, 29) Government-run centers can temporarily house victims, but space is insufficient, and these centers are often staffed by law enforcement officials or employees without appropriate training.(37) In addition, research did not find evidence of programs to specifically address child labor in agriculture, mining, and quarrying.

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Cameroon (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s)
Legal Framework	Ratify the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.	2013 – 2016
	Criminally prohibit the use of children for illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.	2014 – 2016
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016
	Establish a minimum age for compulsory education that is consistent with the minimum age for admission to work.	2009 – 2016
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive and include work under water or work at dangerous heights.	2014 – 2016
	Ensure that laws prohibiting child trafficking do not require threats, the use of force, or coercion to be considered child trafficking and that all children under age 18 are protected.	2015 – 2016
	Enforcement	Significantly increase the number of labor inspectors according to the ILO recommendation.
Collect and publish comprehensive statistics on enforcement efforts, including the total number and type of inspections conducted, violations found, penalties imposed, and convictions obtained.		2009 – 2016
Ensure that labor inspectorates and criminal law enforcement agencies receive an adequate amount of funding with which to conduct inspections and investigations, and that labor inspectors are able to carry out their primary duties of inspection and monitoring.		2009 – 2016
Strengthen the Labor Inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data related to at-risk sectors and patterns of serious incidents, including in the informal sector.		2013 – 2016
Ensure all hotlines for reporting the worst forms of child labor are operational and establish a mechanism to log all calls and track cases of child labor for referral to law enforcement or social services providers.		2015 – 2016
Raise awareness of child trafficking issues to encourage citizens to report offenses to enforcement agencies.		2016
Ensure that boys and girls are not held in detention without reasonable evidence of wrongdoing and that victims are not punished for the worst forms of child labor.		2015 – 2016
Ensure government officials are not complicit in perpetuating the worst forms of child labor.		2016
Coordination	Ensure that existing coordinating mechanisms have clear mandates and are allocated sufficient resources to carry them out.	2014 – 2016
Government Policies	Ensure existing policies, such as PANETEC, receive adequate resources and are implemented.	2016
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the PRSP and the IMC's National Gender Policy Document.	2010 – 2016
Social Programs	Ensure that all children, regardless of refugee status, have access to education by eliminating school-related fees and teacher strikes. Make additional efforts to provide all children with birth registration.	2009 – 2016
	Ensure that the number of schools and teachers is adequate throughout the country.	2009 – 2016
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem in Cameroon and institute programs to address child labor in agriculture, mining, and quarrying.	2009 – 2016
	Ensure that all government-run shelters have sufficient space to accommodate victims and are staffed by employees with the appropriate training to support victims.	2016

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