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2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Congo, Democratic Republic of the (DRC)

Minimal Advancement – Efforts Made but Regression in Practice that Delayed Advancement

In 2022, the Democratic Republic of the Congo made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In October, the Inter-ministerial Commission to Combat Child Labor in Mines and Artisanal Mining Sites launched the Child Labor Monitoring System. Moreover, the Ministry of Labor began recruiting 2,000 labor inspectors and controllers, some of whom will be trained to conduct inspections in mine sites. President Felix Tshisekedi also promulgated Law No^o 22/067 for the Prevention and Fight Against Trafficking in Persons, which strengthened penalties for trafficking in persons. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is receiving an assessment of minimal advancement because of the national army's complicity in the worst forms of child labor. During the year, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo supplied weapons and munitions to non-state armed groups known for recruiting children. Children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are also subjected to other forms of the worst forms of child labor, including in the forced mining of gold, tin ore (cassiterite), tantalum ore (coltan), and tungsten ore (wolframite), and are used in armed conflict, sometimes as a result of forcible recruitment or abduction by non-state armed groups. Children also mine cobalt ore (heterogenite) in the Copperbelt region. The government did not publish labor or criminal law enforcement data. It also failed to take active measures to ensure that children are not inappropriately incarcerated, penalized, or physically harmed solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of their exploitation in the worst forms of child labor. Other gaps remain, including a lack of sufficient numbers of enforcement personnel, insufficient training for enforcement personnel, limited financial resources, and poor coordination of government efforts to address child labor.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	17.4 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	68.8
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	16.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		69.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2017–2018. (2)

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	Farming, including tilling fields, planting seeds, weeding, watering and harvesting crops, carrying heavy loads, [†] and use of chemical products and machetes in the production of beans, corn, manioc, rice, and sweet potatoes (3-6)
	Fishing, including maintaining fishing tools, baiting hooks, transporting heavy loads, using explosives, and salting, smoking, and packaging fish (3-7)
	Herding and raising livestock such as chickens, goats, and pigs, including feeding, cleaning cages or stalls, and disposing of waste (4,8)
Industry	Mining, including carrying heavy loads, [†] digging, sifting, sorting, transporting, using explosives, washing, and working underground [†] in the production of diamonds, copper, cobalt ore (heterogenite), gold, tin ore (cassiterite), tantalum ore (coltan), and tungsten ore (wolframite) (3-6,9-12)
Services	Domestic work (3-6)
	Driving motorcycle taxis (3)
	Street work, including vending, garbage scavenging, and carrying heavy loads (3,6,7)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor[‡]	Forced mining of gold, tantalum (coltan), tin (cassiterite), and tungsten (wolframite), each sometimes as a result of debt bondage (4-6,10,11,13-15)
	Forced domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation (6,13,16,17)
	Use in illicit activities for non-state armed groups, including carrying stolen goods, and smuggling minerals (15,18)
	Recruitment or abduction of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including as checkpoint monitors, combatants, concubines, domestic workers, field hands, human shields, looters, porters, spies, and tax collectors at mining sites (5,6,13)

† 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.

Escalating conflict in the east rendered children increasingly vulnerable to recruitment by non-state armed groups, forced labor in artisanal mining, and prostitution. (6,13,19-25) Non-state armed groups in Ituri reportedly seized young children from their homes, forcing them to transport heavy loads or perform domestic work. (4,23,24) UNICEF and other international organizations estimate that between 40 and 70 percent of non-state armed groups in central DRC include children, some as young as age 5. (6,13,26) Non-state armed groups, criminal gangs, and illicit smuggling networks operating in the DRC continued to abduct, recruit, or use children in armed conflict during the reporting period. (6,13,27) There were also reports of non-state armed groups connected to ISIS-DRC, also known as the Allied Democratic Forces, recruiting children in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri provinces in eastern DRC. (6,23,24,27) The UN verified that a total of 1,545 children, as young as 5, were recruited and used in armed conflict, including in support roles (643), in combat (585), as guards (206), as spies (54) and as fetish keepers (26), and in unspecified roles (31). In October 2022, Human Rights Watch documented claims that the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) had provided ammunition to the armed group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and collaborated with the armed groups Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo, Coalition of Movements for Change, Nyatura, and Nduma Defense of Congo-Renovated. (23,28) The UN verified that these armed groups recruited and used children in 2022. (23,24,29,30)

In eastern Congo's conflict-affected regions, children extract and transport tin (cassiterite), tantalum (coltan), tungsten (wolframite), diamonds, and gold. Thousands of children also work in cobalt and copper mines in the southern Copperbelt region. (31,32) Non-state armed groups and their Congolese political and military backers control mineral resources in this region. (21) Prevalence of child labor is highest in the country's artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector, which operates with minimal oversight. (33) One study detected child labor at 17 of 58 ASM sites surveyed. At informal or illegal ASM operations, children are uniquely exposed to hazardous working conditions and, in some instances, to forced labor. (19,34,35,36) While the exact number of children working in cobalt is unknown, estimates indicate between 5,000 and 35,000 children work as artisanal cobalt miners. (37,38,39) In addition, non-state armed groups subjected children to forced labor in artisanal mines in Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu, and Maniema, where forced labor, armed conflict, and mining are often intertwined. (5,40)

Children from the Kasai region were taken to Kinshasa and used in forced begging schemes. (5,17,40,41) Tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced in eastern DRC's Ituri Province because of the conflict, making thousands of children vulnerable to sex trafficking, forced labor, or commercial sexual exploitation. (40,42,43) Despite evidence that children are subjected to participation in armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation, and forced labor in mining, the prevalence and nature of child labor in other sectors remains unclear because a comprehensive, stand-alone child labor survey has never been conducted in the DRC. (5,23,24)

UNICEF estimates that only 25 percent of children under age 5 have birth certificates. (44) Low rates of birth registration leave many children vulnerable to child labor because it makes age verification difficult during armed forces (FARDC) recruitment campaigns and hinders efforts to identify and separate children associated with armed groups. (10,45) While Congolese law provides for free, compulsory education, only slightly more than half of the DRC's 51,574 public schools were financed by the state. At public schools that did not receive government funding, parents were asked to pay school fees, which were often prohibitively high, to support teacher salaries. (46,47) During the reporting period, at least 750,000 children in eastern DRC's conflict-affected provinces were unable to attend school. (25)

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

The DRC has ratified all 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 (Table 4). However, gaps exist in the DRC's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including a compulsory education age of 12 years that is lower than the minimum age of work, which is 18 years.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	18	Prelude and Articles 6 and 7 of the Labor Code; Articles 2, 50, and 55 of the Child Protection Code (48,49)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 10 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (50)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 8–15 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work; Articles 26 and 299 of the Mining Code; Article 8b of the Decree on Validation Procedures for Artisanal Mines; Article 125 of the Labor Code (49-53)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2 and 3 of the Labor Code; Articles 53 and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 16 and 61 of the Constitution; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work; Article 68 of

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
			the Law on the Prevention and Repression of Trafficking in Persons (48-50,54,55)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	No		Articles 3, 321, 326, and 328 of the Labor Code; Articles 53, 162, and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Article 174j of the Penal Code; Articles 8 and 20 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (48-50,52,55,56)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3 of the Labor Code; Articles 53, 61, 169, 173, 179–180, 182–183, and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 174b, 174j, 174m, and 174n of the Penal Code; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work (48-50,56)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 3 of the Labor Code; Article 8 of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Children's Work; Articles 53, 187–188, and 194 of the Child Protection Code (48-50)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 27 of the Law on the Military Status of the Congolese Armed Forces; Articles 2, 53, 71, and 187 of the Child Protection Code (48,57)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	Yes*		Articles 2 and 7 of the Law on Armed Forces; Article 27 of the Law on the Military Status of the Congolese Armed Forces; Articles 53, 71, and 187 of the Child Protection Code (48,57,58)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 53, 71, and 187 of the Child Protection Code; Article 190 of the Constitution (48,54)
Compulsory Education Age	No	12‡	Article 38 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 7.21, 12, and 72 of the Law on National Education; Article 43 of the Constitution (48,54,59)

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Free Public Education	No		Article 38 of the Child Protection Code; Article 43 of the Constitution; Articles 12 and 72 of the Law on National Education (48,54,59)

* Country has no conscription (61)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (48,59)

During the reporting period, President Tshisekedi promulgated Law No° 22/067 for the Prevention and Fight Against Trafficking in Persons, which criminalizes all forms of trafficking and prescribes stringent penalties. However, the law continues to require a threat, use of force, coercion, fraud, deception, or abuse of power for a child to have been considered trafficked. (29,55) Children are required to attend school only up to age 12, based on available information. This standard makes children ages 12 to 18 vulnerable to child labor as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. In addition, the law provides for free schooling for six years, although basic education is a total of 9 years. The failure to provide for complete free basic education may increase the risk of children's involvement in the worst forms of child labor. (48,54,59)

III. Enforcement of Laws on Child Labor

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Employment, Labor, and Social Welfare (MELSS)	Investigates cases related to child labor, including its worst forms. (62,63) Refers cases of child labor to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) for prosecution. Currently lacks the capacity to conduct inspections in the mining sector. (3)
Ministry of Mines	Includes the Service for Assistance and Supervision of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining, the government agency responsible for artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) regulation and training, and the Division of Mines, which oversees mining-related departments and public services, including large-scale mining, at the provincial level, and enforcement of the 2018 Mining Code. (64-36)
Criminal Enforcement Agencies	The Ministry of Justice enforces criminal laws related to child labor. (3,4) Oversees 5 juvenile courts in Kinshasa and 19 UNICEF-funded child protection courts throughout the country. (4) Assists the International Criminal Court in conducting investigations and prosecuting individuals charged with using children in armed conflict. (3,4,66) The Ministry of Interior investigates allegations of human trafficking rings, refers child labor cases to the MOJ for prosecution, and coordinates support and reintegration services with

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
	the Ministry of Social Affairs, Solidarity, and Humanitarian Action. (3,66) Includes the Special Police Unit for Women and Children, which addresses conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence against women and children, protects women and children who are survivors of physical abuse, and ensures the demobilization of children. (3,4) The Congolese National Police Child Protection and Sexual Violence Directorate has a formal mechanism in place with local NGOs to screen for possible human trafficking survivors among vulnerable groups. (41) In addition, the Mining and Hydrocarbon Police are charged with enforcing the mining code, including prohibitions against child labor, at artisanal and large-scale mining sites. (36) The Ministry of Defense investigates and prosecutes military officials in military courts suspected of recruiting and using child soldiers, and leads the implementation of the Action Plan to End the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers. Through its Department of Child Protection, coordinates actions with UNICEF. (3) Moreover, through its Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Unit, coordinates demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration activities. (66,67)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in the DRC took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Employment, Labor, and Social Welfare (MELSS) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient financial resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Number of Labor Inspectors	212 (6)	217 (23,29)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (49)	Yes (49,50)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Unknown (6)	No (23)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	565 (6,27)	Unknown (23)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Unknown (23)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (6)	Unknown (23)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (49)	Yes (49)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (6)	Unknown (23)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (6)	Yes (23)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (23)

Research indicates that the DRC currently does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (23,29)The government is hiring an additional 2,000 labor inspectors and controllers (serving as inspection assistants) in 2023, for a total of 2,172 inspectors across 23 of the DRC's 26 provinces. (23,29) Once this cohort is trained and deployed, the DRC will have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (68) The Ministry of Labor also increased its budget in 2022 to \$19.6 million, up from \$13 million in 2021. However, there is no reported budget for the Labor Inspectorate, and reports suggests that it suffers from poorly equipped offices, irregular electrical power, and lack government-issued computers and mobile phones. (23) Many inspectors also do not have access to vehicles for inspections and regional labor inspectorates rely on fees collected from violators to sustain their operations. (5,6) In addition, labor inspectors did not receive training on enforcing child labor laws in 2022. (23)

Despite these challenges, provincial authorities conducted inspections in the formal mining sector in Haut Katanga, Tanganyika, and Lualaba, where child labor is known to occur. (5,24) The United States Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement also continued to provide trafficking in persons training as part of its training for mining police. During the reporting period, they trained 245 specialized mining police officers to address human trafficking in this sector. (23)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in the DRC took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including inadequate human resource allocation.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (6)	No (23)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (6)	Unknown (23)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (6)	Unknown (23)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (6)	Yes (23)

While the Ministry of Interior is responsible for investigating allegations of human trafficking and referring child labor cases to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution, it lacks the necessary financial and human resources to carry out its mandate. In addition, the Special Police Unit for the Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Violence (PEPVS) lacks adequate resources to address child trafficking and child labor, especially outside of major cities. (69) Finally, the Ministry of Justice lacks the resources to rapidly, fully, and consistently carry out investigations and prosecutions. (69)

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Commission (UEPN-DDR) coordinates verification and release of children associated with armed groups. Working with the Ministry of Gender and Family, the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), UNICEF, and NGOs, it refers demobilized child soldiers to social service providers for family reunification and reinsertion. (3,66,67) The commission is led by the Ministry of Defense's Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups Unit. (66,67) In addition, the Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting, which is co-chaired by the UN, documents all grave violations committed against children. With UN support, the Centers for Transit and Orientation in North Kivu Province provided psychological counseling, basic education, and job skills training to ex-child soldiers during the reporting period. (6)

The FARDC, mining police, and private security forces, including those guarding large-scale mining concessions, reportedly subject child laborers on ASM sites to extortion and physical abuse. (21,22,70) There is no evidence that the government took action to address these abuses in 2022. (71) In addition, while the FARDC removed children from armed groups, these children were occasionally detained for 2 to 14 days. (5,41) When children are detained, official procedure requires that the government alert MONUSCO, which then assumes responsibility for demobilizing children and referring them to social service providers. Prior to that handover, children may be held in local detention cells, which suffer from overcrowding, lack of food and health services, and poor sanitation. (5,41) Furthermore, penalties for criminal violations related to the worst forms of child labor—including the use of children in armed conflict—are 1 to 3 years' imprisonment with fines of up to \$784 (1,576,624 Congolese Francs); the penalties are insufficient to serve as deterrents. (4,15,48,50,56,72,73)

IV. Coordination of Government Efforts on Child Labor

The government has established a key mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of clarity of institutional mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Committee to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor (CN-PFTE)	Oversees the National Action Plan to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor and monitors its implementation. (74,75) Led by the Ministry of Employment, Labor, and Social Welfare and includes representatives from 12 other ministries, local NGOs, and civil society. (3,74,75) During the reporting period, the committee appointed a new President, the incoming Secretary General of the Ministry of Mines, Jacques Ramazani, who coordinated with the ILO to host a relaunch of the Inter-ministerial Commission to Combat Child Labor in Mines and Artisanal Mining Sites (CISTEMA) on October 26, 2022. CISTEMA, which is chaired by the Ministry of Mines, coordinates efforts to eradicate child labor in the DRC's mining sector and serves as an adviser to other ministries addressing child labor in mining. CISTEMA committed to following national goals to eliminate child labor in artisanal mining by 2025. (23) The CN-PFTE and CISTEMA also validated the Child Labor Monitoring System (CLMS) during the reporting period. (23) The CLMS platform includes a database for tracking cases of child labor in artisanal mines, which can be accessed using cellphones to enable wide-reaching reporting. (23) However, research continued to indicate that coordination among government ministries remained weak, and funding and communication between government entities remains a challenge. (23)

V. Government Policies on Child Labor

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including a lack of regional scope.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
Child Soldiers Action Plans	The DRC has several key policies to address children in armed conflict. The UEPN-DDR's National Disarmament, Demobilization, Repatriation, Reintegration, and Resettlement (DDR III) plan aims to provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to demobilized combatants, including children. (13,14,74,75) DDR III is implemented with UN and international support and within the 2013 Framework Agreement for Peace, Security, and Cooperation for the DRC and the Great Lakes Region. (74,76,77) Requires children separated from armed groups to be immediately transferred to UNICEF. (66) The Action Plan to End the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers is a UN-backed plan that aims to prevent and end the use of children in armed forces, provide support and reintegration services, pursue accountability for perpetrators, and create a partnership framework for the UN and the government. (78,79) Includes standard operating procedures for age verification to help the FARDC avoid underage recruitment. (13,14) In 2022, the MOD worked with the

Policy	Description & Activities
Action Plans to Address Child Labor in Mining	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNICEF to identify and remove child recruits from FARDC and non-state armed groups. (6,80) Includes the National Sectoral Strategy to Combat Child Labor in Artisanal Mines and Artisanal Mining Sites (2017–2025), which was developed by the Ministry of Mines and seeks to eradicate child labor in artisanal mining by 2025. The strategy aims to strengthen relevant laws, improve data collection on the prevalence of child labor in the mining sector, promote responsible sourcing regulations, improve child protection measures, and build stakeholder capacity to address these issues. (81) During the reporting period, CISTEMA officially launched the Child Labor Monitoring System to identify and remove children from mines. (23,24) The government is also cooperating with the Public-Private Alliance for Responsible Minerals Trade to end child labor in the cobalt sector. (82) Finally, the National Action Plan to Combat the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2012–2025) promotes the enforcement of laws prohibiting the worst forms of child labor, universal primary education, monitoring and evaluation efforts, and improved coordination of stakeholders. (6) Also seeks to raise awareness of the worst forms of child labor, empower communities to stop child labor practices, and provide prevention and reintegration services. (23) However, the government does not currently have policies to address child labor in the mining sector at the regional level. (23,24)
Agency for Prevention and the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons' (APLTP) National Action Plan (2020–2024); and new Agency for Youth and the Fight Against Sexual Violence and Trafficking in Persons	Addresses all forms of trafficking in persons, including foreign national and Congolese citizen survivors, as well as child soldiers. (82) Aims to prevent human trafficking through national awareness-raising and government training programs, survivor identification and care, and law enforcement cooperation and coordination. (82) During the reporting period, APLTP worked with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Labor to provide care to child trafficking survivors. In January 2022, APLTP also finalized its plan to distribute and train relevant actors on the newly adopted national standard operating procedures for victim identification. (23,24) During the reporting period, the APLTP was disbanded and in its place, the government created a new agency responsible for coordinating the government's antitrafficking response, the Agency for Youth and the Fight Against Sexual Violence and Trafficking in Persons. (69)

In 2022, President Tshisekedi announced a 4-year Partnership Compact at the Transforming Education Summit in New York. The Compact requires major reforms to teachers' workforce development, including payroll and training, that currently prevent many children in the DRC from attending school. (83) Although the DRC has developed a number of action plans to address child labor, only some received dedicated funding. (12,34,66)

VI. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that may contribute to preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the inadequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem in all relevant sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
Programs under the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Mines	Includes Combating Child Labor in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Cobalt Industry (2018–2022) (COTECCO) , a \$3.5 million project implemented by the ILO in Kolwezi, Lualaba Province, aimed at reducing child labor and improving working conditions in the mining sector; Supporting Progress on Labor Standards in the DRC, a \$3 million project implemented by the ILO to enhance the capacity of the labor inspectorate and improve working conditions; and the Global Trace Protocol Project, a global project that seeks to increase downstream tracing of goods made by child labor and forced labor. (38) Under COTECCO, CISTEMA had appointed a supervisor for the new CLMS and trained 10 CISTEMA personnel on database procedures as of November 2022. CISTEMA was also working to create provincial commissions in 11 provinces to track child labor in mines by the end of the reporting period. (23) (24)
UNICEF-Funded Education Programs	Under the auspices of the government's Free Primary Education Program, and with support from UNICEF and Global Partnership for Education, the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education continued to provide free primary education for children up to the age of 12. (5,6,84,85) In 2022, UNICEF reached 56,000 out-of-school children through its alternative learning pathways. These children, who were unable to attend school due to conflict or natural disaster, were able to continue learning through educational programs on the radio, workbooks, and other learning tools. (83)
USAID-Funded Projects	The USAID-PACT Sustainable Mine Site Validation (SMSV, 2018-2022) is a 4-year cooperative agreement that aims to implement a technically and financially sustainable Mine Site Qualification and Validation model in North and South Kivu that adheres to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals; the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region; Regional Certification Mechanism; and DRC law. (86) SMSV also aims to develop strategies to fight child labor, including by raising awareness of child labor issues among local stakeholders, and by building the capacity of mining inspectors and local stakeholder committees to qualify and validate mine sites. (86) In addition, the Conflict-Free Gold Project seeks to create a transparent supply chain model for clean artisanal gold; Understanding Artisanal Mining Supply Chains and Conflict Financing in DRC is gathering reliable data to address ‘conflict minerals’ trade in eastern DRC; and the Program for the Development of Eastern Congo (P-DEC) aims to adopt bottom-up peacebuilding approaches to reduce conflict and bridge social divisions. (87-89)

For information about USDOL’s projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† Program is funded by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (90,91)

The scope of child disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs remains insufficient, the reintegration process is slow, funding is inadequate, and collaboration between partners is weak. (13,14,45) Furthermore, children separated from armed groups remain vulnerable to stigmatization and re-recruitment. In particular, girls, who make up an estimated 30 to 40 percent of children associated with armed groups, often survive prolonged sexual and physical abuse in captivity and face social exclusion upon their return. (11,45,92,93) There is also a lack of efforts to assist street children and programs to provide support to children engaged in forced labor in agriculture, domestic work, mining, and commercial sexual exploitation. (6,10,11,45,92,93)

VII. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in the DRC (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the compulsory education age from 12 years to 18 years to be consistent with the minimum age for employment.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that laws sufficiently criminally prohibit the various acts involved in the trafficking process and trafficking for the purposes of forced labor.	2021 – 2022
	Establish by law free basic public education, including lower secondary education.	2022
Enforcement	Increase penalties for child labor crimes so that they are sufficiently stringent to serve as a deterrent.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate is fully funded, including providing vehicles for labor inspectors and government-issued computers to allow inspectors to carry out their mandated duties.	2015 – 2022
	Collect and publish complete data on labor enforcement efforts, including labor inspectorate funding, the number of worksite inspections conducted, and the number of violations found, penalties imposed, and fines collected.	2020 – 2022
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 217 to 789 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force.	2015 – 2022
	Ensure that inspectors and criminal law enforcement agencies receive adequate training to carry out their duties.	2011 – 2022

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
	Collect and publish complete data related to criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, convictions achieved, and penalties imposed related to child labor crimes.	2009 – 2022
	End FARDC support for non-state armed groups that recruit children, ensure children are not detained in dangerous conditions, and hold perpetrators of child labor crimes, including child soldiering, accountable.	2017 – 2022
	Issue appropriate decrees to ensure that enacted laws are implemented, including those related to light work provisions.	2009 – 2022
	Ensure the criminal justice system has the resources to investigate and prosecute child labor violations.	2011 – 2022
	Improve coordination among relevant criminal enforcement agencies in conducting investigations, collecting data, and providing services to survivors.	2017 – 2022
	Ensure that security forces do not subject children to human rights violations, including extortion and physical abuse, in artisanal small-scale mining operations.	2019 – 2022
Coordination	Improve coordination among relevant ministries and agencies to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure that they receive adequate resources and trained personnel to address the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking.	2015 – 2022
Government Policies	Ensure all relevant policies, national action plans, and sectoral strategies to address the worst forms of child labor are adopted, funded, and implemented as intended, including at the regional level.	2011 – 2022
Social Programs	Conduct a stand-alone child labor survey to better inform child labor policies and practices along with a prevalence survey focused on mining.	2013 – 2022
	Improve access to education by ensuring that all children are registered at birth or are issued identification documents.	2012 – 2022
	Improve access to education for all children by regulating classroom size, training additional teachers, subsidizing fees,	2012 – 2022

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
	and making additional efforts to prevent schools from being attacked and occupied by armed groups.	
	Expand efforts to address the needs of demobilized children and incorporate stigmatization, gender, and re-recruitment concerns into programs to reintegrate such children.	2009 – 2022
	Establish or expand social programs designed to assist children engaged in forced labor in agriculture, mining, street work, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation, and implement existing programs as intended.	2009 – 2022

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