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2023 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Rwanda

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

In 2023, Rwanda made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government published a new national strategy on the elimination of child labor, which aims to strengthen and expand social protection services for survivors, increase awareness of child labor issues, and improve law enforcement capacity and coordination. It also held a nationwide awareness-raising campaign to educate the public on the risks of human trafficking, which reached over 50,000 people. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Rwanda is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because the government provided material support to, and coordinated with, the March 23 Movement, a non-state armed group which forcibly recruited and used child soldiers in the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Furthermore, the Rwandan army deployed troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo to provide direct military support to the March 23 Movement as the non-state armed group expanded their control over Rutshuru and neighboring Masisi territories. Rwanda's laws do not meet international standards as education is only compulsory up to age 12, leaving children ages 12–15 vulnerable to child labor since they are not legally required to attend school nor legally permitted to work. In addition, education is only free for the first 6 years of school even though international standards call for 9 years of free schooling. Lastly, the labor inspectorate's lack of financial and human resources may impede its efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	6 to 14	5.4% (156,522)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	6 to 14	89.4%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	4.9%

Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Sector/Industry	Percent of Population
Agriculture	78.9%
Industry	3.2%
Services	17.9%

Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Working in agriculture, including carrying heavy loads† and wielding machetes, herding and caring for animals, fishing,† and in the production of tea, including applying fertilizers, † carrying heavy loads,† planting, plucking tea leaves, and weeding. Forestry activities.
Industry	Construction,† mining,† and quarrying.
Services	Street work, including collecting scrap metal,† lifting and transporting heavy loads, † begging, and vending. Repair of motorcycles and motor vehicles. Domestic work.†
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking and forced labor in agricultural work, mining, domestic work, and begging.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Children in Rwanda are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation and forced domestic work. Children also perform dangerous tasks in informal mining, including carrying heavy loads.

† 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.

Reports indicate that the Government of Rwanda provided material support to and coordinated with the March 23 Movement (M23), an armed group that recruited or used child soldiers in the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Additional reports further indicate that the Rwandan army has deployed troops to DRC to provide

direct military support to M23 as they expand their control over Rutshuru and neighboring Masisi territories.

Children at Higher Risk

Research found that children living in mining communities often drop out of school and work in abandoned artisanal mines with their parents. Additionally, homeless and orphaned children, children with disabilities, and girls are at particular risk of being exploited in human trafficking.

Barriers to Education Access

Although the Ministry of Education established a policy that provides free basic education for 12 years, of which the first 9 are compulsory, in practice, the cost of uniforms, school supplies, and unofficial school fees may preclude some families from sending their children to school. The law also establishes English as the primary language of instruction, which may create a barrier to education for children whose first language is not English. Furthermore, children with disabilities face particular difficulties accessing education and reports indicate that many are likely to not attend school or to drop-out because schools lack the capacity to accommodate special needs.

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

Standard	Meets		Legislation
	Age	International Standards	
Minimum for Work	Age 16	✓	Article 5 of the Labor Law; Articles 2, 3, and 7–9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight Against Child Labor
Minimum for Hazardous Work	Age 18	✓	Article 6 of the Labor Law
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Article 6 of the Labor Law; Articles 4–6 of the Ministerial Order Determining the List of Worst Forms of Child Labor; Kigali City Guidelines 2012-02; Articles 7–9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to the Prevention and Fight against Child Labor
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 3.25 and 7 of the Labor Law; Article 178 of the Penal Code; Article 3.4(a), 3.6, 3.21 and 18 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons

Standard	Meets		Legislation
	Age	International Standards	
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	✓		Articles 3.4, 3.6, 3.7, and 18–20 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons; Articles 225, 251, and 259–262 of the Penal Code; Article 51 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Article 31 of the Law Relating to the Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	✓		Articles 3.2 and 24 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons; Articles 211, 259 and 260 of the Penal Code; Articles 34 and 35 of the Law Relating to the Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	✓		Article 220 of the Penal Code; Article 51 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Article 9 of the Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight against Child Labor; Article 263 of the Law Determining Offenses and Penalties in General
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18 ✓		Article 5 of Presidential Order 72/01 Establishing Army General Statutes; Article 7 of Presidential Order 32/01 Establishing Rwanda Defense Forces Special Statute; Article 50 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of	N/A*		Article 5 of Presidential Order 72/01 Establishing Army General Statutes; Articles 99(8) and 100(2)

Standard	Meets		Legislation
	Age	International Standards	
Children by (State) Military Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	of the Law Determining Offenses and Penalties in General Article 221 of the Penal Code
Compulsory Education Age	12	X	Article 47 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Articles 55–58 of the Law Determining the Organization of Education
Free Public Education		X	Article 47 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Articles 55–58 of the Law Determining the Organization of Education

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Rwanda has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Rwanda's laws do not meet international standards on compulsory education age because the law stipulates that education is only compulsory up to age 12. In addition, free public education laws do not meet international standards because education is only free for the first 6 years of schooling.

* Country has no conscription

While Rwanda has adopted policies to implement 12 years of fee-free basic education and compulsory education through age 15, the 2020 Law Determining the Organization of Education stipulates that primary education is free and compulsory only through the first 6 years of schooling and states that education is compulsory only up to age 12. The law also establishes English as the primary language of instruction, which may create a barrier to education for children whose first language is not English. Furthermore, the age up to which education is compulsory makes children between ages 12 and 15 vulnerable to child labor because they are not legally required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work.

III. Enforcement of Laws on Child Labor

Organization/Agency | Role & Activities

Ministry of Public Service and Labor (MIFOTRA): Enforces labor laws, including laws on child labor, in coordination with other government

Organization/Agency | Role & Activities

entities at the national and district level. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, MIFOTRA reintegrates children withdrawn from child labor with their families and enrolls them in school. Furthermore, it mobilizes other ministries and agencies who provide social services, including the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, the National Child Development Agency, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Local Government, to take an active role in child labor law enforcement.

Ministry of Interior: Oversees the Rwandan National Police, the Rwandan Investigation Bureau, and the National Public Prosecution Authority. The Rwandan National Police enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor through its Child Protection Unit and Anti-Trafficking Unit. The Rwandan Investigation Bureau, in turn, conducts criminal investigations, including into the worst forms of child labor, and through its Directorate for Anti-Gender-Based Violence, assists victims of the worst forms of child labor through anti-gender-based violence officers at each of the country's 78 police stations. Both the National Police and Investigation Bureau operate a free hotline to report these incidents. Additionally, the National Public Prosecution Authority is responsible for prosecuting violations of labor laws, including laws on child labor, and through its Anti-Gender-Based Violence unit dedicates 12 prosecutors to work with an additional 60 prosecutors trained in handling relevant cases at the district level.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Rwanda took actions to address child labor. However, an insufficient allocation of human resources and inadequate screening and identification of human trafficking victims may have hindered enforcement efforts.

Overview of Enforcement Efforts	2023
Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes
Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Unknown
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Data on the number of labor inspectors, the number of worksite inspections conducted, and whether child labor violations were found in 2023 are **unknown**. It is also **unknown** whether investigations into

suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions initiated, or perpetrators convicted.

IV. Coordination, Policies, and Programs

Coordinating Body | Role & Activities

Interministerial Steering Committee on Child Labor: Coordinates government efforts related to the worst forms of child labor, reviews child labor laws, advocates for the inclusion of child labor policies in national development plans, oversees the implementation of child labor interventions, and conducts field visits to assess the prevalence of child labor and raise awareness of child labor. Led by MIFOTRA. During the reporting period, MIFOTRA and the Ministry of Local Government held bi-weekly meetings to better coordinate efforts between labor inspectors, local leaders, and local child labor elimination committees.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Rwanda has established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, inadequate training and resources to address human trafficking hindered coordination efforts.

Policy | Description & Activities

National Strategy on Elimination of Child Labor:* Lays out six strategic principles aimed at strengthening the implementation activities of all stakeholders engaged in the coordinated effort to eliminate child labor, including increasing social protection measures, improving community and stakeholders' engagement through awareness and capacity building, mainstreaming child labor preventions across sectors and planning processes, and by strengthening case management, law enforcement, and coordination. The implementation of the Strategy is led by MIFOTRA, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), and the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with partner organizations.

Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy (2019–2024): Aims to improve coordination and implementation issues in child protection, including strategies to address child labor. Focuses on key areas of identity and nationality; family and alternative care; health, survival, and standard of living; education; protection; justice; and participation.

Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan: The Action Plan focuses efforts on human trafficking prevention, victim protection and assistance, prosecution, and strategic partnerships with various stakeholders.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Rwanda has established policies related to child labor. However, some of these policies were not implemented.

* Policy published during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor

issues or had an impact on child labor.

Program | Description & Activities

Programs to Combat Child Labor and Raise Awareness:[†] Includes Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion's (MIGEPROF) campaign to teach parents and community leaders to recognize risk factors for human trafficking and to identify victims; and the Friends of the Family Program (*Inshuti Z'Umuryango*), which trains volunteers to prevent and respond to child protection issues and establishes monitoring committees at various levels to address child labor. While the Friends of the Family Program remained active during the reporting period, research was unable to identify specific activities undertaken to address child labor.

Victim Assistance Programs:[†] Musanze Child Rehabilitation Center in the Northern Province assists children separated from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Gitagata Center provides education, vocational training, psychosocial support, and aims to reunite former street children with their families. Isange One Stop Centers, located in 44 hospitals and district capitals, assist survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking.

It Takes Every Rwandan to End Child Exploitation:[†] Advocacy campaign against child labor and sexual abuse of children supported by MIGEPROF and World Vision Rwanda.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

In 2023, Rwanda funded and participated in programs that include the goal of preventing or eliminating child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors where child labor has been identified, including agriculture and mining.

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 Rwanda.

[‡] The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

V. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Increase the compulsory education age from 12 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.
	Establish by law free basic public education.
	End support for non-state armed groups that recruit children, ensure children are not detained in dangerous conditions, and ensure perpetrators of child labor crimes, including child soldiering, are held accountable.
Enforcement	

Area	Suggested Action
	Ensure the government employs at least 125 labor inspectors to provide adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 4.99 million workers. Ensure that the labor inspectorate has sufficient resources, personnel, and training to identify the characteristics of child labor, enforce child labor laws, and perform worksite inspections. Ensure that criminal law enforcement has adequate resources to investigate, prosecute, and convict child labor crimes, and has sufficient training and capacity to address the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking. Cease the practice of detaining and physically abusing children who work on the street and ensure that any children in detention centers receive adequate screening and services and are not subjected to abuse or unhealthy detention conditions. Improve the ability of law enforcement agencies to share data relevant to the worst forms of child labor.
Coordination	Ensure that coordinating bodies receive adequate resources and training to address both domestic and transnational human trafficking.
Government Policies	Ensure that actions are taken to implement policies related to child labor and that data on these activities are published annually.
Social Programs	Remove barriers to education, such as language barriers for non-English speakers, costs for uniforms and school supplies, and unofficial school fees, and ensure access for children with disabilities. Expand existing social programs to address all relevant sectors in which child labor is known to occur, including agriculture and informal mining. Expand services for human trafficking survivors, including programs for long-term care in shelters. Ensure actions are taken to implement key social programs and data on these activities are published annually. Ensure that service providers are properly trained to identify victims of human trafficking.

Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

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

References

[Download the 2023 Bibliography](#)

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