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2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Burundi

Moderate Advancement

In 2022, Burundi made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Burundian government significantly increased funding for labor inspections, a fourteen-fold increase from 2021. The government, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund, also developed a national strategy to increase the integration of Batwa children into schools. Furthermore, members of Burundi's newly formalized Consultation and Monitoring Commission on Prevention and Repression of Trafficking in Persons completed a draft of a new national action plan on human trafficking, pending approval from authorities and final adoption by the Office of the Prime Minister. However, children in Burundi 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. Burundi's laws do not establish a compulsory education age. And while Burundi has a policy-based compulsory education age of 15, this is lower than its minimum age for work, 16, leaving children vulnerable to labor exploitation. The government also failed to provide comprehensive criminal law enforcement data related to the worst forms of child labor and lacked resources to conduct labor inspections and criminal investigations. Lastly, Burundi has insufficient social programs to address child labor.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Burundi. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	33.2 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	69.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	30.5
Primary Completion Rate (%)		53.0

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2020, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2016–2017. (2)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of coffee, sugarcane, cotton, palm oil, peat, and rice (3-9)
	Fishing, including managing heavy fishing nets and preparing meals for fishermen (3,4,6-11)
	Herding and feeding livestock (3-5,9)
	Forestry, including the production, packing, loading, and unloading of charcoal (7,8)
Industry	Extracting,† washing, and transporting minerals in mines and quarries, including artisanal gold mines (3,4,9)
	Making and transporting bricks (7,8)
	Manufacturing, including soldering, welding, processing plastics and metals, and helping in garages and workshops (6-8)
	Producing, packing, loading, and unloading charcoal (7)
Services	Domestic work (4-6,12,13)
	Street vending, including selling food (3,4,12)
	Begging (4-6,8,14,15)
	Working in hotels and restaurants, including cooking, dishwashing, and waiting tables (3,4)
Categorical Forms of Child Labor‡	Worst Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,11,16)
	Forced domestic work (4,11,16)
	Forced labor in agriculture, mining, charcoal production, construction, fishing, street vending, and begging (3-5,8,11,16)

Sector/Industry	Activity
	Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of marijuana (8,17)

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

† 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.

Burundi is a source country for children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking abroad, and children from rural areas are subjected to human trafficking within the country for domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation. (8,16,18) Reports indicate that an increasing number of children from the Batwa ethnic group are being transported from rural areas into Bujumbura with promises of work and subsequently are exploited. (4) Women who offer room and board to children also sometimes force the children into commercial sexual exploitation to pay expenses. (11) In addition, Burundian girls are taken abroad for commercial sexual exploitation in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and countries in the Middle East. (5,11,16,19,20) Reporting suggests that Burundian children are exploited in Tanzania in forced labor. A civil society organization reported that 509 Burundian child trafficking victims returned to Burundi from Tanzania during the reporting period. (8)

Children work entire days transplanting rice, and typically drop out of school in the pre-harvest season to guard rice plantations from birds. Children are also utilized as lookouts in the forestry industry to report illegal woodcutting or theft, placing them in potentially dangerous situations when smugglers and thieves are present. (6,8,21) In fishing communities near Lake Tanganyika, boys are often engaged in fishing activities without pay while girls work as cooks or domestic employees and are at risk of sexual exploitation. (6,8,11) Civil society organizations indicate that up to 15 percent of children who are school dropouts in urban centers work in the charcoal trade, either packing, loading, and unpacking charcoal or working in fire pits. (6,8) Street children in Burundi may be particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor, including forced begging. (8,22)

While the government abolished primary school fees in 2012, there is no law that guarantees free public education and families are frequently asked to pay for supplies, secondary school fees, and school building maintenance costs, which has prevented many children from accessing public schooling. (4,7,8,23) Inadequate teacher capacity and poor infrastructure have also limited educational opportunity. For example, the lack of gender-separated bathrooms can contribute to a lower attendance rate among girls. (4,7,8) Children with disabilities and mobility issues face

discrimination in schools, along with a lack of appropriate materials and infrastructure, limiting access to education. (24) In addition, refugee children from neighboring countries living in camps in Burundi face barriers to learning due to deteriorating school infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of educators. (8) Moreover, because birth certificates are required to attend school, many unregistered children, in particular children of the Batwa ethnic group and Burundian refugee children repatriating from abroad, remain out of school and vulnerable to child labor. (4,7,8,22,25)

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

Burundi has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Burundi's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of sufficient prohibitions against the use of children by non-state armed groups.

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Articles 2, 10, and 618 of the Labor Code (26)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 270, 279, and 618 of the Labor Code; Article 13 of the Ministerial Ordinance to Regulate Child Labor (26,27)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Articles 9–15 of the Ministerial Ordinance to Regulate Child Labor (27)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 4–6, 10, and 18–20 of the Trafficking in Persons

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Law; Articles 7 and 617 of the Labor Code (26,28) Article 12 of the Labor Code; Articles 4–6, 10, and 18–20 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 197, 246, and 255 of the Penal Code (26,28,29)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 12 of the Labor Code; Articles 542–544 and 546 of the Penal Code; Articles 4, 10, and 18–20 of the Trafficking in Persons Law (26,28,29)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 505–511, 541, and 545 of the Penal Code (29)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 2 and 6(c) of the National Defense Troops Law (30)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		Article 12 of the Labor Code; Articles 200.6, 200.2.27, 200.5.7, and 202 of the Penal Code (26,29)
Compulsory Education Age	No	15‡	Article 35 of the Law on Basic and Secondary Education (31)
Free Public Education	No		Article 53 of the Constitution; Articles 17, 35, and 47 of the Law on Basic and Secondary Education (31,32)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

* Country has no conscription (30)

‡ Age calculated based on available information (31)

In 2022, the government drafted a new Child Protection Code, which has not yet been ratified, to provide more effective protections for children. (8,23) Although the Constitution prohibits the use of children in armed conflict, the Penal Code criminalizes only the use of children under age 15 in armed conflict, leaving children between the ages of 15 and 18 vulnerable to this worst form of child labor. (29,33) Burundian law does prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 by state armed forces, and available evidence indicates that the government continued to comply with this provision. (3,34) Although it does not appear that there are any laws that establish compulsory education, there is a policy that provides for compulsory education to age 15. (35,36) However, even the policy-based compulsory education age is lower than the minimum age for work, leaving children between the ages of 15 and 16 vulnerable to labor exploitation. (26,37) The Law on Basic and Secondary Education states that free education will be guaranteed as established by decree, but research was unable to locate the relevant decree. (8,23,31) Moreover, the Law on Basic and Secondary Education calls on parents to finance education, which suggests that educational officials or schools would be permitted to levy fees. (31)

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 their child labor laws.

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Employment	Administers and enforces all labor laws, including those on child labor, through the Inspector General of Work and Social Security. (38)
Ministry of Interior, Community Development, and Public Security	Conducts criminal investigations on the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor, child trafficking, and the use of children in illicit activities. Through the Burundi National Police's Unit for the Protection of Minors and Morals, protects children from commercial sexual exploitation, illicit activity, forced labor, and military recruitment. (3-5,16,34)
Ministry of Justice	Prosecutes cases of the worst forms of child labor through its General Prosecutor's Office. (3-5)

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Burundi took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Employment that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including an insufficient number of labor inspectors.

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,589 (7)	\$38,510 (8)
Number of Labor Inspectors	40 (7)	40 (8)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (26)	Yes (26)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (7)	Yes (8)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (7)	1,000 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (7)	0 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (7)	N/A (8)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (7)	N/A (8)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (8)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (7)	Unknown (8)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (26)	Yes (26)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (8)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (7)	Yes (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (8)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

In 2022, 20 labor inspectors were trained on the labor code and social protection issues. (9) The government also significantly increased the budget for labor inspections during the reporting period, and the additional funding helped cover some travel expenses for inspectors, per diems for inspection visits, awareness campaigns on companies' social obligations, and ongoing development of the national health and safety policy. (8) However, a lack of sufficient resources for travel, fuel, and computer equipment continued to hamper the enforcement of child labor laws. (5,8,39) Reporting also suggests that inspections are conducted exclusively in the formal and semi-formal sectors, including in large-scale enterprises, in which child labor is relatively rare. As such, inspections are not conducted in the informal sector, including in informal agricultural labor, where child labor is much more prevalent. (4,7,8,40,41) In addition, research indicates that Burundi does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their duties. (8,42,43)

Criminal Law Enforcement

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

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Unknown (7)	Yes (8)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (7)	Unknown (8)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (7)	Unknown (8)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (7)	Unknown (8)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (7)	Unknown (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (8)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

During the reporting period, 30 magistrates and judicial police officers and 90 police officers from the General Commissariat for Migration received training from IOM on trafficking in persons. (9) The government also operates multiple hotlines that assist in the identification of child trafficking cases, including one specifically to report child abuse managed by the Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights and Gender. (44) In 2022, the government continued to implement measures to prevent international child trafficking, including increased patrols of communes bordering neighboring countries and inspection of vehicles leaving Bujumbura for international travel. (45) In September 2022, Burundian police identified 20 children believed to be on their way to Tanzania to engage in child labor, including forced labor. The Burundian National Police and local authorities took the children into protective custody, provided them with assistance, and returned them to their families. (44)

The government lacked resources to fully implement criminal law enforcement strategies. For example, while the Burundi National Police Unit for the Protection of Minors and Morals was responsible for investigating trafficking in persons, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and child labor issues, it lacked capacity and often did not receive referrals from other police units. (19) Reporting indicates that investigators lack sufficient office spaces and supplies, transportation, fuel, and computer equipment. (8) The government acknowledged that officials are unfamiliar with the 2014 anti-trafficking law and thus are not

sufficiently familiar with the concepts of the worst forms of child labor. (11,16,41) Burundi lacks formal guidance for authorities on how to respond to cases potentially involving the worst forms of child labor, and law enforcement lacked sufficient training to properly identify such cases. Although a referral mechanism between law enforcement and social services exists, civil society organizations indicate it is utilized on an ad hoc basis, thus making it difficult to ensure survivors receive services. (11,18) In general, agencies lacked resources necessary to respond to survivors' needs and had to rely primarily on services from civil society and international organizations. (11,19) During the reporting period, 90 street children were arrested by police. Street children who are arrested are often taken to temporary rehabilitation centers, which have been presented as prisons for children, before being returned to their families. (22,46) The government did not provide complete information on its criminal law enforcement efforts for inclusion in this report, including the number of investigations, prosecutions initiated, convictions, and penalties imposed. (8)

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 insufficient resources.

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
Multisector Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Under the Child and Family Department and the Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights, and Gender, works with the Ministry of Public Service, Labor, and Employment and local NGOs to address child protection issues, including the worst forms of child labor. (6,7,47) Has made strides in reaching areas beyond the capital region, with a greater presence and ability to respond to cases upcountry. However, it is primarily funded by UNICEF and small NGOs, and reporting suggests that its resources are still insufficient to fully address the worst forms of child labor. (47)

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

In addition to the key coordinating mechanism above, Burundi's Consultation and Monitoring Commission on Prevention and Repression of Trafficking in Persons began operations as a permanent formal inter-ministerial body in January 2022. (44,45) The Commission oversees national anti-trafficking efforts and the national social protection policy. (8) During the reporting period, the Commission promoted and implemented standard operating procedures for identifying trafficking

cases and referring survivors to appropriate services and care, including comprehensive processes and screening protocols, and organized trainings for government officials such as police officers, social workers, judges, and diplomats. It also drafted a new national action plan to combat human trafficking for 2023–2027, which was forwarded to the Office of the Prime Minister for approval. (8,44) However, the Commission currently lacks the resources and training required to collect data and report on cases of human trafficking. (44)

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 relevant policies covering all worst forms of child labor.

Policy	Description & Activities
National Child Protection Policy 2020–2024	Aims to ensure child welfare systemically by increasing understanding of children’s rights; preventing discrimination, abuse, and exploitation; identifying issues and intervening quickly and effectively using the appropriate community mechanisms; and building the economic and general resilience of children, families, and communities. (23,48) Conducted awareness-raising activities among local administrators and educational leaders about child labor during the reporting period. (23)
Burundi National Development Plan (2018–2027)	Aims to address economic and social challenges in the country, with goals to target poverty and access to education. Seeks to enhance youth employment through strategies such as updates to the labor code and improvements in basic and vocational education. (49) As part of this policy and in cooperation with the UN, Burundi continued its Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan during the reporting period. In 2022, the program provided food assistance and core relief items to 21,157 returning refugees. (50-52)

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

‡ The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (53)

In 2022, the government had yet to renew its national action plan to address child labor, which expired in 2015, or its anti-trafficking plan, which expired in 2020. (8,44) While Burundi has broad child protection and national development policies, it does not have a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor. (47)

VI. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

In 2022, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or 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 sectors.

Program	Description & Activities
Centers for Family Development†	Operated by the Ministry of National Solidarity, Social Affairs, Human Rights, and Gender, address human rights issues, including child exploitation. Coordinate with Child Protection Committees to refer survivors to local NGOs for care, when necessary. (54) Remained active during the reporting period, including reintegrating 15 street children with their home communities. (8)
Education Cannot Wait, Burundi Multi-Year Resilience Program	Launched in 2021, a collaborative agreement among the Government of Burundi, UNICEF, and World Vision (2022–2024), a 3-year, \$30 million program aiming to provide educational opportunities to 300,000 vulnerable children and reduce the risks of exploitation, including child labor, for vulnerable families. (55,56) During the reporting period, interventions included cash transfers to promote school retention, dignity kits for adolescent girls, increasing and improving classroom infrastructure, school feeding programs, and providing learning materials. (57)
National School Feeding Program†	Initiated in 2008, the National School Feeding Program, sponsored by Burundi's First Lady, is designed to reduce child labor by increasing school retention. In addition to funding received from international donors, the program was granted several million USD in funding from the Government of Burundi during the reporting period, and provided meals to children in 664 schools throughout the country. (8,58,59)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

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 partially funded by the Government of Burundi.

In addition to the programs above, the government also collaborated with UNICEF to develop a national strategy for integration and inclusion of the Batwa population, which includes sensitization programs to integrate Batwa children into schools in Ngozi and other provinces. UNICEF also works with local governments to secure identity documents for Burundian

children repatriating from abroad. (8) However, research found no evidence that the government has carried out programs to assist children working in agriculture, in which child labor is most prevalent.

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 Burundi (Table 11).

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
Legal Framework	Establish by law an age up to which education is compulsory that extends to age 16, the minimum age for employment.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2012 2022	–
	Establish by law free basic public education.	2022	
Enforcement	Conduct targeted inspections in sectors and geographic areas in which child labor is known to be prevalent, including in agriculture and the informal sector.	2020 2022	–
	Publish information on child labor law enforcement efforts, including the number of routine targeted inspections.	2021 2022	–
	Ensure that children engaged in begging are not arrested, and that they receive adequate social services and reintegration support.	2022	
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 40 to 125 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 5 million people.	2009 2022	–
	Provide sufficient funding and resources to the Inspector General of Work and Social Security to cover needs such as travel, fuel, and computer equipment.	2009 2022	–
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, convictions obtained, and penalties imposed related to the criminal enforcement of child labor laws.	2017 2022	–
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement officials receive adequate training on laws pertaining to the worst forms of child labor.	2019 2022	–
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement agencies and other agencies responsible for	2019 2022	–

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
	responding to human trafficking have the resources, guidance, and capacity necessary to investigate cases and provide services to survivors.		
	Strengthen referral mechanisms between law enforcement agencies, social services, and civil society organizations to ensure that cases are properly investigated and survivors receive services.	2020 2022	–
Coordination	Improve the capacity of the Multisector Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor to ensure coverage in areas outside of the capital city.	2015 2022	–
	Ensure that the Consultation and Monitoring Commission on Prevention and Repression of Trafficking in Persons is provided with sufficient resources and training to collect data and report effectively on cases of human trafficking.	2022	
Government Policies	Adopt and implement policies that address all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as a national child labor action plan and a national trafficking in persons action plan.	2015 2022	–
Social Programs	Increase access to education by eliminating school-related fees; increasing the number of educators; expanding infrastructure to accommodate the needs of female and disabled students; and increasing birth registration rates for populations such as the Batwa ethnic group.	2015 2022	–
	Institute new programs and expand existing ones in sectors in which child labor is prevalent, including in agriculture.	2009 2022	–

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

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