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2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Nigeria

Moderate Advancement

In 2022, Nigeria made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Five additional Nigerian Governors signed the Child Rights Act, which provides free and compulsory education for children and prohibits the use of children in illicit activities and by non-state armed groups. The government also hired over 180 labor inspectors and increased inspections from 10,526 in 2021 to 17,026 in 2022. In addition, the government established 11 community child labor monitoring committees, which oversee child labor projects and outreach efforts at the local level. Finally, the government adopted a new national action plan on human trafficking and conducted a national child labor survey in order to better inform their child labor policies. However, children in Nigeria are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation and use in armed conflict, as well as quarrying granite and artisanal mining. Although the government made meaningful efforts in all relevant areas during the reporting period, protections related to the minimum age for work do not apply to children who are self-employed or working in the informal economy. In addition, the state of Kano does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Nigeria. 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	15 (6,798,456)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	78

Children	Age	Percent
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	10.4
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from General Household Survey (GHS), 2019. (2)

These data are not comparable with data presented in last year's report due to changes in survey source, survey questionnaire, or age range surveyed.

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, cotton, tea, manioc/cassava, cocoa, rice, and tobacco (3-6)
	Fishing, activities unknown (7)
	Herding livestock (4,6,8,9)
Industry	Mining and quarrying of granite and gravel (3,6,8,9)
	Artisanal gold mining (4,6,9,10)
	Harvesting sand (10)
	Construction, including making bricks and carrying construction materials (3,4,6,8,9)
Services	Domestic work (3,4,8,9,11,12)
	Collecting money on public buses, washing cars, and automotive repair (4,8,9,11)
	Street work, including vending, begging, and scavenging (3,4,8,9,11)
Categorical Forms of Labor†	Worst of Child
	Commercial sexual exploitation, including use in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,8,12,13)
	Forced labor in begging; domestic work; street vending; textile manufacturing; mining and quarrying gravel, granite, and artisanal gold; and agriculture, including in cocoa (4,9,12,13)
	Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict and in non-conflict support roles, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8,9)

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

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Nigeria continues to be a source, transit, and destination country for forced labor and sex trafficking of both adults and children. Trafficked Nigerians are recruited from primarily rural areas within the country, with women and girls recruited for domestic work and sex trafficking while boys are recruited for street vending, domestic work, mining, agriculture, and begging. (6,8) Benin City, the capital of Edo State, continues to be a major human trafficking hub in Africa, but increased enforcement efforts may have caused some human trafficking rings to shift their focus to other areas of southern Nigeria. (14) Rapid population growth in Nigeria is also driving the informal education sector, with several million boys in the north going to Quranic schools known as *Almajiri*. The government does not officially recognize these schools, and students attending *Almajiri* schools are officially considered to be out of school. (8) The *Almajiri* system includes a component of child labor, with some teachers tasking older children with menial jobs and other children forced into begging. (8,9,15) Despite notable military advances and proclamations of Boko Haram's defeat by government forces, the group remained a security threat, with escalating attacks by both Boko Haram and ISIS West Africa in Nigeria's northeastern regions. These attacks have contributed to the displacement of more than 2 million people, of which 56 percent were children. (6,16-18)

UNICEF reported that as of January 2022, at least 10.5 million children, or one-third of all Nigerian children, are out of school in Nigeria, making it the highest out-of-school rate in the world. Northeastern and northwestern states have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7 percent and 47.3 percent, respectively. (8,19) The widespread increase in kidnappings, killings, village raids, and cattle-rustling throughout the Northwest and North Central regions led by organized criminal groups has also contributed to the intermittent closure of schools throughout the region, with these challenges being more acute in rural areas. (8,19) Reports also suggest that children lacking birth certificates or other formal documentation have been denied access to public schools. Although it is unclear how widespread this issue is, research suggests that it is most common in the northeastern region and rural areas. (9)

Although free and compulsory education is federally mandated by the Education Act, little enforcement of compulsory education laws occurs at the state level. School fees are often charged in practice, and the cost of materials can be prohibitive for families. (4,9) When families experience economic hardship, the enrollment of boys is typically prioritized over the enrollment of girls. Other barriers to education include a lack of trained teachers, sexual harassment, inadequate sanitation facilities, poor infrastructure, and fear of abduction or attack by Boko Haram while at

school, particularly for girls in the northeastern part of the country.
(4,8,11,17,20,21)

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

Nigeria 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 Nigeria's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including setting the minimum age for work at 12 years old.

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	12	Section 59(1) and 91 of the Labor Act; Sections 28, 29, and 277 of the Child's Right Act (22,23)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 59 (5) and (6) of the Labor Act; Sections 28, 29, and 277 of the Child's Right Act; Sections 23 and 82 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015 (22-24)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Sections 59–61 and 91 of the Labor Act; Section 28 of the Child's Right Act; (22,23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 13, 21–25, and 82 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015; Sections 28, 30, and 277 of the

Standard	Meets		Age	Legislation
	International Standards			
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes			Child's Right Act; Article 34 of the Constitution (23-25) Sections 13, 16, 17, 21-25, and 82 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015; Sections 30, 33, and 277 of the Child's Right Act (23,24)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes			Sections 13-17 and 82 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015; Section 23 of the Cybercrimes Act; Sections 30, 32, and 277 of the Child's Right Act (23-26)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No			Sections 25, 26, 30, and 277 of the Child's Right Act (23)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Recruitment	Yes	18		Section 28 of the Armed Forces Act; Sections 34 and 277 of the Child's Right Act (23,27)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*			
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No			Section 19 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act (24)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	15		Sections 2 and 15 of the Education Act; Section 15 of the Child's Right Act (23,28)
Free Public Education	Yes			Sections 2 and 3 of the Education Act; Section 15 of the Child's Right Act (23,28)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

* Country has no conscription (27)

In 2022, five additional Nigerian Governors signed the Child Rights Act (CRA), which provides free and compulsory education for children and prohibits the use of children in illicit activities and by non-state armed groups. Each state must adopt and implement the act in its territory for the CRA to become law. (23,29,30) However, only 35 of the 36 states have adopted and implemented the CRA, leaving the state of Kano in northern Nigeria with a legal statute that does not meet international standards for the prohibition against the use of children in illicit activities. (6,23,26,29,31) Furthermore, under the CRA, certain provisions of the labor act that are not in compliance with international standard may remain in force. This includes Section 59, which sets the minimum age for employment at age 12 in contradiction to the CRA, which only permits children under age 18 to engage in light work for family members. (22,23) The minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, which may encourage children to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (22,23,28)

The Labor Act also permits children of any age to do light work in agriculture and domestic work if they are working with a family member, which does not meet international standards. Furthermore, the minimum age protections in the Labor Act do not apply to children who are self-employed or working in the informal economy. (22,32) Lastly, children are not excluded from the Terrorism Prevention Act's penalty of life imprisonment for assisting in acts of terrorism and are implicitly included as people in Section 19 of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act. (24,33)

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
Labor Inspectorate, Ministry of Labor and Employment (MLE)	Deploys labor inspectors across 36 state labor offices and the federal capital territory to enforce federal child labor laws. In 2022, carried out activities to commemorate the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor. (4,34-36)
Anti-Trafficking Agencies	Enforces laws against human trafficking and exploitative labor. Coordinates with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development and state governments to provide child labor survivors with social services and reunite trafficked children with their families. (4,12,34) Operates hotlines for survivors in Abuja and each zonal command

Organization/Agency	Role & Activities
	center. Includes an Investigation and Security Unit tasked with the prevention and detection of human trafficking cases. (14,20,37)
Nigeria Police	Enforces all laws prohibiting forced child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Collaborates with the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking (NAPTIP) to address human trafficking issues. (4)

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$515,375 (8)	\$859,771 (37)
Number of Labor Inspectors	1,402 (8)	1,586 (37)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (8)	Yes (6)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	10,526 (8)	17,026 (37)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	3,234 (8)	4,088 (38)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (39)	2 (37)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (39)	Unknown
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (8)	Unknown
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	No (8)	Yes (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (6)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Enforcement of child labor laws was negatively impacted by a lack of resources for inspections, including office facilities, transportation, fuel, and other necessities to carry out inspections. While a reciprocal referral mechanism between labor authorities and social services exists, research did not find mechanisms to enforce existing protections for children in the

informal sector. (8,9,40,41) Research also indicates that Nigeria does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (42)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Nigeria 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 the allocation of resources.

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	N/A (8)	Yes (43)
Number of Investigations	6 (39)	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	6 (39)	0 (38)
Number of Convictions	0 (39)	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	0 (39)	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (8)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

While criminal law enforcement information was provided, the information was not disaggregated by age. (43) In addition, research suggests that criminal enforcement agencies are underfunded and lack the necessary resources and vehicles to access remote areas of the country for inspections. (6)

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).

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Coordinates efforts to address child labor. Led by MLE and comprises representatives from seven governmental agencies, faith-based organizations, NGOs, ILO, and UNICEF. (4,9) Members are charged with leveraging resources for project implementation from their institutions and identifying synergies with other existing programs. (4,9) During the reporting period, the government established 11 Community Child Labor Monitoring Committees, which oversee child labor projects and outreach efforts. (6)

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

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 implementation.

Policy	Description & Activities
NAPTIP National Action Plan on Human Trafficking in Nigeria (2022–2026)†	During the reporting period, the government adopted the National Action Plan on Human Trafficking in Nigeria for 2022–2026 and provided it with a \$33 million budget. Provides a framework for mobilizing the action plan and all stakeholders involved in addressing human trafficking, with an emphasis on enforcement, prosecution, and provision of services to survivors. (6,9,44,45) During the reporting period, 12 action plan protection officers were trained and appointed to 6 areas throughout the country. The purpose of these officers is to assist survivors and coordinate the activities of the police forces to address human trafficking issues. (6,8,9,44,46) In addition, the action plan created and adopted a Disability Inclusion Plan in 2022, which includes procedures for an all-encompassing service delivery for survivors of human trafficking who may have a disability. (43)
National Social Behavioral Change Communication Strategy for Elimination of Child Labor in Nigeria (2020–2023)	Addresses child labor at the household and community levels through awareness-raising activities. (9) Research was unable to determine whether any actions were undertaken to implement this policy during the reporting period.
National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism	Designed to end the recruitment and use of children by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Aims to promote the protection of children’s rights, ensures that suspects under age 18 are treated in accordance with international law, and provides for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration for children previously associated with CJTF. (47) The UN and CJTF, with the support of the government, continued to reintegrate children during the reporting period. (45) Since the signing of the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, the UN has reported nearly no use of children by CJTF. (9,30,45)

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

‡ The government had other policies that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (9)

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 efforts to address the problem in all sectors.

Program	Description & Activities
NAPTIP Shelters for Human Trafficking Victims†	Government-funded program that operates 10 shelters in Nigeria, capable of housing up to 315 trafficking survivors. Shelters provide legal, medical, and psychological services, as well as vocational training and business management skills, along with referring survivors to NGOs for additional care. (12,13,15) However, research found concerns regarding the conditions in shelters housing human trafficking survivors. These conditions include poor housing facilities, a lack of food, and insufficient stipends, along with reports of survivors being held against their will for extended periods at shelters run by NAPTIP. (41,48) During the reporting period, a new 28-bed shelter was developed while another shelter was renovated. In addition, NAPTIP hosted two co-mentoring sessions for survivors of human trafficking so that the government could provide a platform for survivors to engage with each other and discuss with government officials how to best support them. (44)
Accelerating Action for the Elimination of Child Labor in Supply Chains in Africa (ACCEL Africa) (2018–2022)	ILO-sponsored regional project aimed at eliminating child labor in supply chains, with particular focus on those involved in the production of cocoa, coffee, cotton, gold, and tea. Collaborated with global supply chain actors working in Africa on public policy, good governance, empowerment, representation, partnership, and knowledge sharing. (5,50) During the reporting period, the ACCEL AFRICA project sponsored a regional conference that brought together 14 African countries to discuss best practices for eliminating child labor. (6,50)
World Bank-Funded Programs	Projects aimed to improve access to education. Include: National Social Safety Nets Project (2016–2022), a \$50 million project that aimed to provide primary school lunches and offered conditional cash transfers based on children's enrollment; and the Better Education Service Delivery for All (2017–2022), a \$611 million

Program	Description & Activities
	project that aimed to increase access to education for out-of-school youth and improve literacy. (51-54) In 2022, the National Social Safety Nets Project enrolled participants in all 36 states across the country and delivered cash transfers to 2.7 million households. (54) Since its inception, the Better Education Service Delivery for All project has helped reduce the number of out-of-school children by 924,590, of which 633,772 were girls. (53,55)

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 funded by the Government of Nigeria.

During the reporting period, the government conducted a national child labor survey that helped improve knowledge and awareness surrounding child labor. (6,56) However, research found no evidence of programs to address all relevant worst forms of child labor, including the use of children in armed conflict, quarrying granite, artisanal mining, and commercial sexual exploitation. (9)

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 Nigeria (Table 11).

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work from 12 to 15 to align with the compulsory education age.	2012 2022	–
	Ensure that national legislation on the minimum age for work is consistent so that all children are protected, including those in the informal sector and who are self-employed.	2012 2022	–
	Harmonize the Child's Right Act and the Labor Act to ensure that their legal provisions do not contradict each other, including provisions on minimum age for work and light work.	2022	
	Ensure that using, procuring, and offering a child for the production and trafficking of drugs are criminally prohibited in all states.	2015 2022	–

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that provisions related to light work conform to international standards by putting restrictions on domestic and agricultural work.	2009 – 2022
	Amend the Terrorism Prevention Act to prohibit the punishment of children for their association with armed groups.	2016 – 2022
	Increase the number of inspectors from 1,402 to 4,885 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force.	2016 – 2022
	Ensure that labor inspectors and enforcement agencies receive sufficient resources, including funding, resources for inspections, office facilities, transportation, fuel, and other necessities, to enforce child labor laws.	2016 – 2022
	Establish a mechanism to enforce existing protections for children working in the informal sector.	2009 – 2022
	Publish information on child labor law enforcement, including whether penalties were imposed and collected for child labor violations and whether targeted routine inspections were conducted.	2020 – 2022
Coordination	Publish disaggregated information on criminal law enforcement, including training for criminal investigators, number of investigations, prosecutions initiated, convictions, and imposed penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2021 – 2022
	Ensure that the National Steering Committee for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor is active and able to carry out their mandates as intended.	2018 – 2022
Government Policies	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement government policies and that data on these activities are published during the reporting period, specifically the National Social Behavioral Change	2021 – 2022

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
Social Programs	Communication Strategy for Elimination of Child Labor in Nigeria (2020–2023).		
	Ensure that all states adopt programs to offer free education and expand existing programs that provide funds to vulnerable children, especially girls, to cover school fees and the cost of materials.	2014 2022	–
	Establish a robust mechanism to ensure that children are provided birth documentation so they are able to attend school.	2020 2022	–
	Ensure that there is an adequate number of trained teachers and provide sufficient educational infrastructure for children, particularly girls, to access schools.	2015 2022	–
	Ensure that there are proper protection protocols in place to keep schools safe, including from acts of terrorism and sexual violence.	2022	
	Ensure that the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Matters and related agencies provide appropriate facilities and resources, including livable stipends and adequate housing, to survivors, and that survivors are not held against their will in shelters.	2019 2022	–
	Establish programs that prevent and remove children from all relevant worst forms of child labor, including armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation, and gold mining.	2009 2022	–

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

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