

Rwanda

NO ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT COMPLICIT IN FORCED CHILD LABOR

In 2024, Rwanda is receiving an assessment of no advancement. Despite initiatives to address child labor, Rwanda is assessed as having made no advancement because it demonstrated complicity in the use of forced child labor. According to United Nations reporting, Rwanda Defense Force officers recruited children, sometimes forcibly, for use by the March 23 Movement as combatants, escorts, servants, and in other support roles during their continued support of and coordination with the March 23 Movement, a non-state armed group in the Democratic Republic of the Congo also known for recruiting and using child soldiers. Furthermore, the Rwandan army deployed troops to the Democratic Republic of Congo to provide direct military support to the March 23 Movement as the group expanded their control over the eastern region of the country. Otherwise, the government issued a Ministerial Instruction aimed at bolstering online safety and protection measures for children and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the International Organization for Migration focused on enhancing victim support, raising awareness, and strengthening measures to prevent human trafficking in the country. However, Rwanda’s laws do not meet international standards as education is only compulsory up to age 12, leaving children ages 12 to 16 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. Finally, the labor inspectorate’s lack of financial and human resources may impede its efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education			Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14	
Children	Age	Percent and Population	Sector/Industry	Percent of Population
Working	6 to 14	5.4% (156,522)	Agriculture	78.9%
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable	Industry	3.2%
Attending School	6 to 14	89.4%	Services	17.9%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	4.9%		

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.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Working in agriculture, including carrying heavy loads,† 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† and mining.†
Services	Street work, including collecting scrap metal,† lifting and transporting heavy loads,† begging, and vending. 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.

† 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.

According to UN reporting, members of the Rwanda Defense Force recruited children as young as 12 years old, sometimes forcibly and through false promises of remuneration, for use by the March 23 Movement (M23) as combatants, escorts, servants, diggers of trenches and underground tunnels, and in other support roles during armed conflict in 2024. Furthermore, the government continued to provide material support to and coordinated with M23, an armed group known for recruiting and using child soldiers in the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Reports also indicate that the Rwandan army has deployed its own troops to the DRC to provide direct military support to M23 as they expanded their control over the eastern region of the country.

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.

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Establish by law free public education through the basic level.
	Increase the compulsory education age from 12 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.
Enforcement	End the Rwanda Defense Force's recruitment of children for use by M23, as well as any support, including military or in-kind support, given to non-state armed groups that recruit children. Additionally, ensure that previously recruited children are identified, demobilized, and returned to their families, while holding perpetrators of child soldiering crimes accountable to the fullest extent appropriate under the law.
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 36 to 133 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 5.3 million workers. Provide the labor inspectorate with sufficient resources, personnel, and adequate training to strengthen their ability to identify the characteristics of child labor, enforce child labor laws, and perform worksite inspections.
	Provide criminal law enforcement with adequate resources to investigate, prosecute, and convict child labor crimes, and sufficiently increase their training and capacity to address the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking.
	Cease the practice of detaining children who work on the street and ensure that any children in detention centers receive adequate screening and services and are not subjected to unhealthy detention conditions.
	Improve the ability of law enforcement agencies to share data relevant to the worst forms of child labor.
Coordination	Provide adequate resources and training to coordinating bodies to increase their capability to address both domestic and transnational human trafficking.
Government Policies	Take actions to implement policies related to child labor and annually publish data on these activities.
Social Programs	Remove barriers to education, such as language barriers for non-English speakers, costs for uniforms and school supplies, and unofficial school fees; furthermore, expand educational access to children with disabilities and create programs for children living in mining communities to decrease school dropout rates.
	Increase 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. Additionally, increase services to homeless and orphaned children, children with disabilities, and girls to decrease their probability of being exploited in human trafficking.
	Take actions to implement key social programs and annually publish data on these activities.
	Train service providers to properly identify victims of human trafficking.

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 targeted by human traffickers.

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 government also established 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 mental or physical 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.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR 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 free and compulsory for the first 6 years of schooling, which ends at approximately age 12.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	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 Age for Hazardous Work	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; Articles 3.4(a), 3.6, 3.21 and 18 of the Law on Prevention, Suppression, and Punishment of Trafficking in Persons
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 Children by (State) Military		N/A	Article 5 of Presidential Order 72/01 Establishing Army General Statutes; Articles 99(8) and 100(2) of the Law Determining Offenses and Penalties in General
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Article 221 of the Penal Code

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Compulsory Education Age	12	X	Article 47 of the Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child; Articles 55, 56, and 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 and 57 of the Law Determining the Organization of Education

* 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. Furthermore, the age up to which education is compulsory makes children between ages 12 and 16 vulnerable to child labor because they are not legally required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, 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.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement	
Ministry of Public Service and Labor (MIFOTRA):	Enforces labor laws, including laws on child labor, in coordination with other government 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 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 Investigation Bureau, in turn, conducts criminal investigations, including into the worst forms of child labor, and assists victims of the worst forms of child labor 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 dedicates 12 prosecutors to work with an additional 60 prosecutors trained in handling relevant cases at the district level. Reports indicate challenges in officials' ability to distinguish human trafficking from other crimes due to a lack of victim identification protocol hindering effective support and intervention for trafficking victims, including children.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts	
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

In 2024, 36 labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding an **unknown** number of child labor violations. It is also **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions initiated, or perpetrators convicted.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

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

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
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.

Rwanda established policies related to child labor. However, some of these policies were not implemented during the reporting period.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
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 ministry agencies including MIFOTRA and the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with partner organizations.
Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy (2019–2024): Aimed to improve coordination and implementation issues in child protection, including strategies to address child labor. Focused 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.

† The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.

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.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Programs to Combat Child Labor and Raise Awareness:† Includes government campaigns to teach parents and community leaders to recognize risk factors for human trafficking and to identify victims. The Friends of the Family Program (<i>Inshuti Z’Umyango</i>) 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 is run by the Rwandan Demobilization and Reintegration Commission and assists children separated from armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In 2024, the center continued to provide medical care, food, clothing, and access to hygiene facilities to former child soldiers. The center also provided psychological support through psychotherapy and medication, aiming to help victims recover from trauma and improve their mental health. The government-established 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 violence and human trafficking.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

It Takes Every Rwandan to End Child Exploitation:[‡] Advocacy campaign against child labor and sexual abuse of children with support from World Vision Rwanda. This program is a nationwide advocacy initiative launched by World Vision Rwanda in partnership with the National Child Development Agency and other government agencies. In 2024, the program continued to be implemented through different activities such as community engagement (collaboration with local leaders, civil society, and religious figures), education and training, and strengthening incident reporting mechanisms.

[‡] 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.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports