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2022 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child
Labor: Cameroon

Moderate Advancement

In 2022, Cameroon made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Officials from the East Regional Delegate of the Ministry of Social Affairs identified 3,000 children engaged in child labor at 46 mining sites. In addition, the government inaugurated a new anti-trafficking hotline, 1503, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration. Finally, the Government of Cameroon supported access to education by distributing 1,803,906 free textbooks to students at 13,000 primary schools and hiring an additional 3,000 primary school teachers. However, children in Cameroon are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in recruitment by non-state armed groups for use in conflict. Children also perform dangerous tasks in cocoa production and gold mining. The government has not addressed gaps in Cameroon's legal framework regarding the prohibition of use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs, and the prohibition of the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Cameroon. 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	43.7 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	80.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	42.4

Primary Completion Rate (%) 69.2

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2023. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 5 (MICS 5), 2014. (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 bananas, kola nuts, cocoa, and coffee, including handling pesticides, using machetes, clearing fields, climbing trees, and lifting heavy loads† (3-5)
	Raising livestock (6)
	Fishing (6)
Industry	Working in artisanal gold mines † and gravel quarries, † transporting heavy loads of sand or gravel, breaking stones, handling mercury, and digging or standing in stagnant water to extract minerals (6-9)
	Construction, including carrying water, concrete, and cement blocks (3,5)
Services	Domestic work (3,10)
	Working in restaurants and as phone booth operators (3,6)
	Working in transportation, including as assistants to bus drivers (6,11,12)
	Street work, including vending and begging (3,6)
Categorical Forms of Labor‡	Worst of Child Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (6,13,14) Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict, including fighting, gathering intelligence, providing operational support as porters and cooks, and sexual slavery (6,13) Forced labor in agriculture in the production of cocoa, cotton, onions, and tea; fishing; raising livestock; domestic work; spare parts shops; artisanal gold mines and gravel quarries; street vending; and construction (6,13) Forced begging (6,13)

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.

Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking from neighboring countries in Central and West Africa; child trafficking also occurs within Cameroon. (6,13,14) Children are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work, and forced labor in mining and agriculture. (13,14) Parents often entrust children to intermediaries who promise to take them to urban centers for education or improved living conditions, and these children are often subjected to exploitation. (13) In the artisanal mining sector in eastern Cameroon, children are subjected to hazardous conditions, including frequent collapses of open pit mines and use of dangerous chemicals including mercury. (6-8,15)

Several crises within Cameroon and in neighboring countries—including the Central African Republic refugee crisis; the Lake Chad Basin Crisis impacting Cameroon's Far North as well as Nigeria, Niger, and Chad; and the separatist crisis in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions—have heightened children's vulnerability. (16) As of December 2022, 3.9 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance, and Cameroon was home to over 1 million displaced people and nearly half a million refugees, primarily from Nigeria and the Central African Republic. Disruptions to family livelihoods as a result of these crises place children at greater risk of human trafficking and child labor. (16) In 2022, in the Far North Region near Lake Chad, non-state armed group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) recruited and used children. (6) English-speaking separatist groups in the Northwest and Southwest regions have recruited and used children as fighters. (6) Anecdotal evidence suggests that some community neighborhood watch groups in the Far North Region, known as Vigilance Committees, may have incorporated children into their ranks. Vigilance Committees carry out reconnaissance operations against Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa, and some receive non-lethal material support from the government. (6,13,14,17)

Ongoing violence in Cameroon and the surrounding regions has significantly disrupted children's schooling, making both Cameroonian and refugee children vulnerable to exploitation. In prior years, armed separatist groups have violently enforced school boycotts, leading to long-term disruptions of education for children in the Northwest and Southwest regions. (18) While calls for school boycotts subsided in 2022, separatists continued to attack and kidnap students and teachers who attended classes, often releasing them only after collecting ransom. (6,18) In addition, armed separatists have occupied and used schools as camps

and bases for their operations. (18) According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 3,223 of 5,724 schools in the Northwest and Southwest regions are non-functional. (6) In the Far North Region, terrorist activity by Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa has also disrupted children's schooling, and at least 66 schools remained closed in the aftermath of attacks. (6) Research suggests that roughly 36 percent of primary school students lack birth certificates, which are required to register for end-of-course examinations to enter secondary school. (3,19) Many public officials in the Northwest and Southwest regions have fled since the beginning of the crisis in those regions, reducing access to birth registration services. In addition, many internally displaced children lost their birth certificates as they fled the violence and have been unable to participate in end-of-course examinations. (3) The law guarantees free education up to the age of 12, but in practice, additional school fees are often charged and families must pay the cost of books and uniforms, which is a significant barrier for many families. (6,19,20) Further barriers to education include inadequate school facility infrastructure, including toilets and sanitation facilities, and an insufficient number of teachers. (6,21)

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

Cameroon 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 Cameroon's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the lack of prohibition of the use of children in illicit activities.

Standard	Meets	
	International Standards	Age Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14 Article 2 of Order N° 17 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code (22,23)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18 Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor; Section 86 of

Standard	Meets		Age	Legislation
	International Standards			
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	of Yes			the Labor Code (22,23) Articles 9–23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor (23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	of Yes			Sections 2–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Sections 11 and 342-1 of the Penal Code; Section 2 of the Labor Code (22,24,25)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	of No			Sections 2 and 4–6 of the Law Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Articles 11, 342-1, and 352–354 of the Penal Code (24,25)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	of Yes			Articles 294 and 344–347 of the Penal Code; Articles 76, 81, and 82 of the Law on Cybersecurity and Cyber-criminality (24,26)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	of No			
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes		18	Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers (27,28)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	of Yes*			Article 12 of the Decree Concerning the Status of Non-Defense Military Personnel; Article 2a of the Decree Establishing the Conditions for Admission to Military Training Schools for Officers (27,28)
Prohibition of Military	of No			

Standard	Meets		Age	Legislation
	International Standards	Armed Groups		
Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups				
Compulsory Education Age	No		12‡	Preamble of the Constitution; Articles 9 and 16 of the Law Orienting the Education System (29,30)
Free Education		Public No		Article 9 of the Law Orienting the Education System; Articles 46-2, 47, and 48 of the Decree on the Organization of Public Schools (30,31)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

* Country has no conscription (32)
‡ Age calculated based on available information (33)

Children in Cameroon are required to attend only 6 years of primary school, which typically concludes at age 12. This standard makes children ages 13 and 14 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. (29,30) In addition, the Decree on the Organization of Public Schools provides for free schooling only through primary school, but basic education is a total of 9 years and includes 3 years of lower secondary school. The failure to provide for complete free basic education may increase the risk of children's involvement in the worst forms of child labor. (31) Human trafficking provisions do not meet international standards because they require threats, the use of force, or coercion to be established for the crime of child trafficking, and individuals ages 16 to 18 are not considered children for the purposes of trafficking in persons provisions. (24,25) In addition, the types of hazardous work prohibited for children under age 18 are not comprehensive because work at dangerous heights and underwater is not prohibited. (23,34)

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 Labor and Social Security (MINLSS)	Enforces labor laws, including those related to child labor, and promotes decent working conditions. (35)

Organization/Agency		Role & Activities
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)		Prosecutes cases referred by the General Delegate for National Security or the Ministry of Defense's National Gendarmerie (SED), and contributes to investigations, as appropriate. (3,35)
	Criminal Law Enforcement Agencies	The General Delegate for National Security operates as the national police service of Cameroon, enforces laws against the worst forms of child labor, and investigates violations in urban areas. (3,35) Through its Special Vice Squad, it investigates cases of human trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse against women and children. (3,35) The SED investigates cases of child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in both urban and rural areas before referring cases to MOJ for prosecution. (3,35) It also operates a reporting hotline for human trafficking cases. (3,35,36)

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,840,000 (3)	Unknown (6)
Number of Labor Inspectors	223 (3)	224 (6)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	5,348 (3)	5,481 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (3)	0 (6)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (3)	N/A (6)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (3)	N/A (6)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (22)	Yes (6)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	No (3)	No (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (6)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

While MINLSS reported that it did not find any cases of child labor during its inspections, other government ministries conducted inspections and identified children subjected to the worst forms of child labor. (6) In September 2022, a government official in the East Region reported that officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) had identified 3,000 children engaged in child labor at 46 mining sites during the reporting year. (6) MINAS and the Ministry of Mines, Industries, and Technological Development carried out inspections at mining sites in the South Region and identified 10 children engaged in child labor. (6)

Research indicates that Cameroon does not have an adequate number of labor inspectors to carry out their mandated duties. (3,37) Labor inspectors do not conduct inspections in the informal sector, in which the majority of child labor occurs. (3,38) While the government did not provide for publication the labor inspectorate's funding, it reported that it allocated \$167,000 to child labor prevention and elimination efforts, in comparison with \$120,000 in 2021. (6) Despite this increase in funds, the labor inspectorate lacked sufficient resources, including transportation, to carry out its mission. (6) Government officials, journalists, and NGOs in the East Region indicated that labor inspections rarely took place, especially at rural mining sites at which children are known to work. (3,6) Although the government has not created a formal mechanism for filing and responding to complaints about child labor, cases of child labor can be reported directly to any of the institutions, including MINAS, MINLSS, the National Gendarmerie's State Defense Secretariat, and the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). (6)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Cameroon 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 insufficient allocation of financial resources.

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (6)
Number of Investigations	0 (17)	Unknown (6)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (17)	Unknown (6)
Number of Convictions	0 (17)	Unknown (6)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (17)	Unknown (6)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (6)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

In July 2022, the National Interpol Bureau coordinated with criminal law enforcement and social services agencies to identify Nigerian children in Cameroon who had been subjected to trafficking and forced labor in automobile shops in Cameroon. (6,39) In addition, MINAS inaugurated a government-sponsored anti-trafficking hotline, 1503, in cooperation with the IOM. The hotline allows real-time interaction with representatives from the police, gendarmerie, MOJ, and social and health services. (6) In May 2022, the government and the IOM held a workshop that trained 800 gendarmerie officers on trafficking in persons, case identification and investigation, and referral to social services and prosecution. (39) Law enforcement officers, however, did not receive training specifically addressing child labor, and criminal law enforcement agencies do not receive adequate funding to investigate the worst forms of child labor. (6,12,40) In 2013, MINAS and IOM developed the National Referral System and Standard Operating Procedures to coordinate the identification and assistance of human trafficking victims, including children found to be in the worst forms of child labor. Research shows no evidence of relevant stakeholders using this system during the reporting period. (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). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including the lack of resources to carry out mandates.

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
National Committee to Combat Child Labor (CNLCTE)	Coordinates government efforts to address child labor. Led by MINLSS and includes representatives from other ministries and government bodies as well as representatives from civil society. (41) In 2022, CNLCTE drafted a revision of the list of hazardous work prohibited for children, but the draft has not yet been made into law. (6) In addition, the Government of Cameroon carried out a communication seminar on universal social protection and the elimination of child

**Coordinating
Body**

Role & Activities

labor. (6) Research indicates that CNLCTE has not made significant progress because of a lack of dedicated resources. There is also evidence to suggest that each of the government agencies represented in the committee looked for its own funding and initiated its own activities without significant coordination. (12)

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 the lack of a policy specifically dedicated to addressing child labor.

Policy

Description & Activities

		Incorporates the reduction of poverty, improved access to basic services, and the elimination of child labor into the national development strategy. Calls for improved legal frameworks to address the worst
NDS30	National	forms of child labor, universal primary education
Development		enrollment and completion, and eventually, free
Strategy	(2020–	education through 10 years of schooling. (42) In
2030)		2022, the Government of Cameroon provided public
		schools with tables, chairs, and scholarships to
		facilitate enrollment, especially in the Far North
		Region where education access has been hampered
		by insecurity. (6)
		Focuses on addressing trafficking in persons,
		including child trafficking. Objectives include raising
Operational Action		awareness, improving the provision of services to
Plan to Combat		human trafficking survivors, increasing prosecution
Trafficking	in	of traffickers, enhancing data collection, and
Persons	and	coordinating execution of anti-trafficking efforts.
Smuggling	of	(43) Includes the goals of identifying and
Migrants	(2021–	suppressing forced child labor and the commercial
2023)		sexual exploitation of children. (43) In 2022, the
		government continued to implement the action plan
		through relevant government ministries, and it
		began the process of updating the plan. (39)

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

In 2018, the Government of Cameroon drafted a National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Cameroon, 2018–2025. Although research could not confirm if the government has formally

adopted this plan, various government ministries carried out activities in support of the plan in 2022, and the National Committee to Combat child Labor met to evaluate the plan's implementation. (6,17,38,44)

VI. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

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

Program	Description & Activities
Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children (Project 559)†	In conjunction with the National Employment Fund, this MINAS-funded program provides street children with health care, education, and psychosocial care, and supports the reintegration of street children by providing vocational training opportunities at the Betamba Childhood Institute. (3,4,40) During the reporting year, MINAS completed a modernization of the Betamba Childhood Institute. (6,39)
Support Project in Quality Management for Cocoa and Coffee Production/Forever Chocolate (2019–2025)†	Promotes labor standards in the cocoa industry, including the elimination of child labor. (5) Implemented by the NGO association <i>Enfant Jeunesse Avenir</i> , in partnership with Cameroon's largest cocoa processor, Cameroon Cacao Industrial Corporation. Key stakeholders of the project include government ministries such as the Ministry of Health, MINAS, the Ministry of Women Empowerment and the Family, MINLSS, and the Ministry of Basic Education. (5) The project is implemented in cocoa production basins using the Farmer Field School Extension Approach and aims to train cocoa farmers to produce cocoa that is free of child labor and utilizes environmentally friendly techniques. (5) The project provides services to children at risk of child labor, including school-fee exemptions, school kits, and health services. Also seeks to empower women and provide families with alternative sources of income to limit the involvement of children in child labor. (3) In addition, the project includes monitoring and remediation systems aimed at ensuring the traceability of cocoa supply chains and eliminating child labor. (3) During the reporting period, the project expanded monitoring and remediation systems, encouraged school attendance by providing school kits and facilitating birth registration, and provided

Program	Description & Activities
Zero Children in Gold Mines†	education and training to communities on child labor. (6)
	Project implemented by the state-owned National Mining Corporation, SONAMINES, to eliminate child labor in gold mining in the East Region, where there are more than 300 gold-mining sites. (3,14) During the reporting period, SONOMINES carried out a 5-day awareness-raising campaign promoting school attendance and encouraging parents to prevent children from working in gold mines. It also distributed educational materials to children in at least 15 schools. (6)

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 Cameroon.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (6)

During the reporting year, the government made efforts to enhance educational access across the country. As part of the Support Program for the Reform of Education in Cameroon, the government distributed 1,803,906 free textbooks to students at 13,000 primary schools. (6) In addition, the Government of Cameroon recruited and assigned 3,000 new teachers at primary schools across the country. (6) Although the government has implemented programs to improve education access and address child labor in mining, street work, and cocoa production, research suggests that the scope of current programs is insufficient to address the extent of the problem due to limited resources and insufficient geographic coverage. (3)

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 Cameroon (Table 11).

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for compulsory education from 12 to 14 so it is consistent with the minimum age for admission to work.	2009 – 2022
	Criminally prohibit the use of children for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2014 – 2022

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s)	
		Suggested	
Enforcement	Establish by law free basic public education.	2019 2022	–
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 2022	–
	Ensure that laws prohibiting child trafficking do not require threats, the use of force, or coercion to be considered child trafficking, and that all children under age 18 are protected.	2015 2022	–
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive and include work at dangerous heights and underwater.	2014 2022	–
	Publish information on labor inspectorate funding.	2021 2022	–
	Establish a mechanism for the Ministry of Labor and Social Security to receive child labor complaints.	2021 2022	–
	Increase the number of labor inspectors from 224 to 772 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 11.6 million people.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate receives sufficient funding, including for transportation, to carry out its mission.	2009 2022	–
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by conducting inspections in all sectors, including the mining sector and the informal sector.	2013 2022	–
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement receive adequate training and funding to investigate cases of the worst forms of child labor.	2022	
	Collect and publish comprehensive statistics on criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of investigations, the number of prosecutions, the number of convictions, and whether penalties were imposed for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure that the National Referral System and Standard Operating Procedures work	2021 2022	–

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested	
	effectively to coordinate the identification and assistance of human trafficking victims.		
Coordination	Ensure that the National Committee to Combat Child Labor receives sufficient resources to carry out its stated mandates.	2014 2022	–
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.	2021 2022	–
Social Programs	Ensure that internally displaced and refugee children have access to education and ensure that schools remain free from violence and are not appropriated for other purposes.	2018 2022	–
	Take measures to increase birth registration and expand access to identity documents to ensure children have access to education and other social protection mechanisms.	2020 2022	–
	Ensure that children are able to access education by eliminating or defraying the cost of informal school fees, books, and uniforms.	2009 2022	–
	Ensure that the number of schools, teachers, and sanitation facilities are adequate throughout the country.	2009 2022	–
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem in Cameroon.	2009 2022	–

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

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