In 2015, Benin made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government passed an amendment to the Child Code, containing provisions on labor exploitation, the sale or possession of child pornography, and begging. The Government hired 31 new labor inspectors, trained criminal law enforcement officials, and initiated a birth registration awareness-raising campaign. However, children in Benin are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture, particularly in the production of cotton, and in the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work. Limited resources for the systematic enforcement of child labor laws impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. The national action plan pertaining to the worst forms of child labor remains unfunded, and social programs to combat child labor are insufficient to adequately address the extent of the problem.

I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Benin are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture, particularly in the production of cotton.(1-3) Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work.(4-6) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Benin.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	20.9 (680,004)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	71.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	16.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		76.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2014, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(7)
Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey, 2011–2012.(8)

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

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

Sector/Industry	Activity		
Agriculture	Production of cotton† and cashew nuts*† (3, 9, 10)		
	Capturing,* cleaning,* and descaling fish*† (1, 11, 12)		
	Raising livestock*† (11)		
Industry	Collecting,*† crushing,*† washing,*† and sieving stones† for gold mining*† and gravel*† and granite quarrying† (5, 13-15)		
	Construction, including brickmaking*† (1, 6, 12, 15)		
Services	Domestic work† (1, 2, 5, 6, 15-18)		
	Working as mechanics† and in the transportation industry*† (1, 13, 15)		
	Street vending,† including gasoline* (1, 13, 15)		
Dressmaking*† and carpentry*† (1, 11)			
	Begging*† (1, 6)		
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in domestic work, construction,* mining,* fishing,* granite quarrying, and agriculture,* including in the production of cotton, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 14, 16, 17, 19)		
	Forced begging* (2, 20, 21)		



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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation* sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (2, 4, 6, 22)

^{*} Evidence of this activity is limited and/or the extent of the problem is unknown.

Benin is a source, transit, and destination country for trafficked children. Children are trafficked mostly within Benin but also to other West and Central African countries, primarily Gabon, Nigeria, and the Republic of Congo. (23) Children are trafficked for domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, as well as to work in vending, farming, stone quarries, and handicraft activities. (5, 16, 24-26)

Through the system of *vidomegon*, girls as young as age 7 are sent to relatives or strangers to work as domestic workers in exchange for food, housing, and schooling. In practice, some of these girls receive care and an education; however, many become victims of labor exploitation and sexual abuse.(1, 5, 6, 16, 23) In Northern Benin, some boys placed in the care of Koranic teachers for the purpose of education are forced by their teachers to beg on the street or to work in fields; they must then surrender the money they have earned to their teachers.(6, 20, 21)

A study conducted by ILO-IPEC in 2013 found 2,553 children working in 102 surveyed mines and quarries across Benin.(14) Children who work in quarries are subject to long working hours and to physical injuries and illnesses from dynamite explosions, falling rocks, collapsing quarry walls, and dust inhalation.(13, 14, 27) A UNICEF study of three markets in Benin revealed more than 7,800 children working in the markets, mainly as street vendors. Children working in markets are exposed to injuries and sexual and physical abuse.(6, 28)

Although the constitution guarantees free compulsory primary education by law, in practice, some parents are expected to pay school fees for registration, uniforms, books, and materials.(1, 4, 16, 29) This may make children more vulnerable to child labor, including its worst forms. In addition, evidence suggests that incidences of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, including corporal punishment and rape of students by teachers, prevent some children from remaining in school.(6, 22, 30, 31) Children with disabilities had no access to the regular education system.(1)

The Government has been working with UNICEF to establish new civil registration centers in smaller towns and neighborhoods and, in January 2015, initiated a 2-week national birth registration awareness campaign; however, some children in Benin continued to be unregistered.(6, 23, 32) Unregistered children may have difficulty accessing services, such as education.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

	Convention	Ratification
KETTO EN	ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
A TOTAL	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	✓

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4).

[†] 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.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Article 166 of the Labor Code; Article 210 of the Child Code (33, 34)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 1 of the Hazardous Occupation List (35)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Hazardous Occupation List (35)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Article 212 of the Child Code (33, 34, 36)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Articles 6 and 22 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Article 212 of the Child Code (33, 34, 36)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 3 of the Law on the Prevention and Repression of Violence Against Women and Children; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 212 and 378 of the Child Code (34, 36, 37)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 212 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors (34, 36)
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 6 of Law 2005-43(38)
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Article 6 of Law 2005-43(38)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	11‡	Article 24 of Act No. 2003-17(39)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 13 of the Constitution; Article 114 of the Child Code (34, 40)

[‡] Age calculated based on available information (39)

Benin's Child Code is a compilation of existing legislation related to children's rights, education, protection, labor, and health. In January 2015, the Government passed an amendment to the Child Code containing provisions regarding offenses involving minors, including labor exploitation, the sale or possession of child pornography, and begging.(34) The amendment also prohibits using, procuring, or offering children for the production and trafficking of drugs, as defined by international standards regarding the worst forms of child labor.(34)

Article 22 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors prescribes penalties—6 months to 2 years of imprisonment—or fines for human trafficking crimes involving labor exploitation. These punishments are neither sufficiently stringent nor commensurate with the punishments prescribed for other serious crimes, such as rape.(2, 36) A revised Labor Code, which proposes to increase the penalties for child labor violations and to increase the minimum age of employment to age 15, has been developed.(41) Research did not find information indicating whether the revised Labor Code had been approved in 2015.

Beninese children are required to attend only 6 years of primary school, through age 11.(1, 42) Since the minimum age for children to work is 14, children ages 12 and 13 are particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor, as they may have completed primary school but are not legally permitted to work.

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Civil Service's Office of Labor	Enforce labor laws and investigate Labor Code infractions, including those related to child labor.(1, 4, 22, 43)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Interior's Central Office for the Protection of Minors (OCPM), under the Criminal Police Department	Enforce criminal laws related to the protection of minors, including the worst forms of child labor.(2, 4, 6, 22)
Ministry of Family, Social Affairs, and National Solidarity (MFSN)	Provide support to victims of child labor and human trafficking.(6, 22) In the case of the Directorate of the Family, Children, and Adolescence, tasked with implementing assistance and social reinsertion programs for children in difficult situations.(1, 4, 6, 15)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2015, labor law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

2014	2015
Unknown	Unknown (32)
56 (32)	87 (32)
Yes (2)	Yes (32)
No (32) No (32) No (32)	Unknown (32) No (32) Unknown (32)
Unknown Unknown Unknown	Unknown (32) Unknown (32) Unknown (32)
4 (32)	Unknown (32)
Unknown Unknown	Unknown (32) Unknown (32)
Unknown Unknown	No (32) Unknown (32)
Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Unknown	Unknown (32)
Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Yes (32)	Yes (32)
	Unknown 56 (32) Yes (2) No (32) No (32) No (32) Unknown Yes (32) Unknown Yes (32)

In 2015, Ministry of Labor personnel were employed in 12 departments across Benin to ensure the application of labor laws, including those on child labor.(32) In November, the Ministry of Labor hired 31 additional labor inspectors, 25 labor controllers, and 5 labor administrators.(32) According to the ILO's recommendation of 1 inspector for every 40,000 workers in less developed economies, the Government of Benin should employ approximately 92 inspectors to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country.(44-46) The labor inspectorate lacks material and financial resources to effectively conduct inspections.(2, 6) There is no formal or informal mechanism to coordinate enforcement actions between the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service and the Ministry of Interior's Central Office for the Protection of Minors (OCPM).(47) Additionally, UNICEF reports that child rights laws, including child labor laws, are often not enforced.(48)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2015, criminal law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown	Yes (23)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (32)	Unknown (32)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	Yes (23)

Table 7 Criminal	I aw Enforcement	Efforts Related to the	Worst Forms of (hild Labor (cont)
Table 7. Criminai	Law Enforcement	emorts Related to the	worst forms of u	iniid Labor (cont)

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Number of Investigations	4 (32)	Unknown (32)
Number of Violations Found	4 (32)	Unknown (32)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown	Unknown (32)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	Unknown (32)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (22, 49)	Yes (32)

In 2015, the Government of Benin worked with UNICEF to provide training to 60 press and radio journalists on child labor and human trafficking.(23) The Government also collaborated with *Terre des Hommes* to train police officers, social assistants, journalists, and local NGOs in Benin on the identification and reintegration of migrant children and to provide similar trainings for community workers both in Benin and in Nigeria.(23) In 2015, senior police officials learned about child trafficking as part of their police academy training, and judges and other officials in charge of child protection participated in anti-trafficking in persons trainings in Benin or abroad.(23)

The Government does not maintain comprehensive records of criminal enforcement for all agencies. OCPM reported handling 49 child trafficking cases and 12 exploitive child labor cases in 2015, involving 12 suspected traffickers.(23) OCPM also reported rescuing and providing shelter to 131 child trafficking victims in 2015.(23, 32). Additionally, in 2015, *gendarmes* arrested a trafficker for bringing two girls to a village in Nigeria to work as domestic servants.(23) Despite these efforts, OCPM remained understaffed; underfunded; and without adequate office supplies, transportation, and fuel to enforce laws effectively and to provide victims with immediate assistance.(2, 6, 32) The police lacked the transportation resources to investigate human trafficking cases and the tools with which to maintain database records.(23) Court officials were also unable to maintain database records on trafficking in persons and lacked the personnel and infrastructure to efficiently prosecute cases.(23)

In 2015, the Ministry of Family developed an integrated database to include information that would allow for the identification of children in need of special protection and information related to violence against women and children. (23)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor	Provide policy guidance; approve programs; and coordinate, monitor, and evaluate efforts to combat child labor in Benin.(4, 6) Led by the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service. Comprises delegates from multiple Beninese ministries, UNICEF, ILO, trade unions, and NGOs.(4, 22, 41) In 2015, the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor met once to coordinate and evaluate existing child labor programs in Benin.(47)
National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection (CNSCPE)	Implement, coordinate, and monitor government efforts on child protection. Chaired by MFSN and comprises five technical committees, including a committee for human trafficking and labor exploitation.(41) Each committee has an action plan and proposes activities to the CNSCPE.(50) Includes 40 members from sector-based ministries, NGO networks, international technical and financial partners, and bilateral partners.(50, 51) The CNSCPE did not meet during the reporting period.(23)
Departmental Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection	Coordinate, monitor, and evaluate efforts on child protection at the departmental level. Comprises six departmental committees that identify child protection activities. Compile and analyze the data gathered and report it to the CNSCPE.(12, 52)
National Commission on Children's Rights	Coordinate and promote efforts on children's rights at the national level. Chaired by the Ministry of Justice. Comprises delegates from multiple other ministries and representatives of civil society groups, who are appointed by the Minister of Justice.(6)Met during the reporting period.(53)

The mandates of the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor, the National Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection, and the National Commission on Children's Rights overlap and are a source of confusion.(6, 48) In addition, although there is an information management system at the national level, data are rarely analyzed or used to affect implementation on the ground.(48, 53)

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V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Benin has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

Table 9. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor (NAP) in Benin (2012–2015)	Aims to improve child labor by conducting awareness-raising campaigns; increasing access to education and training; reducing socioeconomic vulnerabilities through livelihood strategies; increasing enforcement efforts; strengthening protection and monitoring measures for victims of exploitive child labor; and harmonizing the legal sector by ensuring that judges, police officers, and labor inspectors have access to and understand pertinent laws related to child labor.(4, 54) The Government publicized and disseminated NAP and began work to harmonize legislation related to the worst forms of child labor.(41, 55) The Ministries of Labor, Justice, and Family and National Solidarity conduct activities under NAP that are also included in each ministry's 2015 activity plans.(55)
Bipartite Declaration to Combat Child Labor Between the Government of Benin and the Beninese Worker Associations	Pledges to promote efforts to reduce the worst forms of child labor and to collaborate at all levels with all parties concerned with combating child labor.(56)
Action Plan to Eradicate Child Exploitation in Markets	Aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in the major markets of Benin, including Dantokpa in Cotonou, Ouando in Porto-Novo, and Arzèkè in Parakou, and to strengthen child labor laws, raise awareness of child labor in markets, and create social programs for children rescued from labor exploitation in the targeted markets.(57, 58)
Benin and Nigeria Joint Committee to Combat Child Trafficking	Aims to reinforce border security measures and repatriate victims of human trafficking between Benin and Nigeria.(59, 60)
Anti-Trafficking Accord Between the Republic of Benin and the Republic of the Congo	Targets the identification, prevention, and rehabilitation of cross-border trafficked children between Benin and the Republic of the Congo. Includes components for monitoring and evaluation, and for conducting cross-border investigations.(61, 62)
National Policy for Child Protection (2014–2025)	Aims to improve child protection in Benin. Includes components to improve school feeding programs and to combat the worst forms of child labor, with a focus on child trafficking.(57, 63) Implemented by MFSN.(57, 63)
Decent Work Country Program (2010–2015)	Identifies three objectives of decent work: (1) promoting social dialogue, (2) creating jobs and guaranteeing rights at work for vulnerable populations, and (3) extending social protection.(64) Includes, as an outcome, improving the operational environment for the elimination of child labor and its worst forms. Led by the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service's Office of Labor and supported by the ILO.(64)
Education Sector Action Plan (2006–2015)*	Aims to reduce poverty and improve access to primary education, especially for girls. Overseen by the Ministry of Education.(65)
Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper PRSP (2011–2015)*	Aims to improve free universal primary education, education quality, student retention rates, provision of social services, and vocational training and microfinance for youth and women. Led by the Ministry of Development and Economic Analysis and supported by international donors.(66)

^{*} Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

In 2015, the National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Benin remained unfunded. (53, 57)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2015, the Government of Benin funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Strengthening Social Dialogue as an Effective Tool to Address the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2012–2015)	Government of Ireland-funded, 3-year, \$760,883 project to combat child labor through social dialogue.(67)

Table 10. Social Programs to Address Child Labor (cont)

Program	Description
Irish Aid-ILO Partnership Program Phase II (2014–2015)	Government of Ireland-funded, 3-year, \$798,913 project to combat child labor in stone-breaking. Aimed to improve decent working conditions for women in Benin's stone-breaking cooperatives and associations by providing equipment that is safer and more productive, thereby increasing women's earning potential and decreasing the need for child labor. (68, 69)
Understanding Children's Work–Action Against Child Labor (2015–2017)	Government of Canada-funded, 3-year, \$334,106 project to combat child labor by supporting data collection and policy efforts related to children's work and youth employment. (70)
MFSN Social Promotion Centers†	Government program that provides food, shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable children, including victims of labor exploitation. MFSN operates 85 centers located throughout the country, which provided services to 131 trafficking victims in 2015.(2, 6, 22)
Transit Center for Children	OCPM facility used as interim care facility for human trafficking survivors prior to their placement in a long-term shelter.(22, 41)
Awareness-raising campaigns†	Government-implemented human trafficking campaigns.(2)
Ministry of Mines' Social Services†	Business management training offered to families, particularly women, involved in mining and quarrying. Also, protection equipment, including boots and gloves, provided to mining craftsman in three cities. (41, 57)
Vocational School Program for Survivors of Child Trafficking†	MFSN program, implemented with UNICEF. Maintains a vocational school program to train survivors of child trafficking in a trade.(41, 53)
Benin Global Partnership for Education Program (2014–2017)	Approximately \$42.3-million, World Bank-funded project that aims to improve access and equity to quality basic education in highly impoverished districts in Benin. Primary completion rate in targeted districts increased to 52.5 percent in 2015 from 40.4 percent in 2011.(71)
Second Chance Schools (2013–2015)	USAID-funded, \$3.5-million, 4-year project, which ended in October, 2015. Promoted alternative approaches to basic education by providing out-of-school children with basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills.(53, 72, 73)

[†] Program is funded by the Government of Benin.

Although the Government of Benin has implemented programs to protect children from human trafficking and participated in programs focused on child labor in quarrying and mining, research found no evidence that the Government has conducted programs to assist children engaged in other worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, or agriculture.

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Benin (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Create meaningful penalties for human trafficking crimes involving labor exploitation.	2014 – 2015
	Raise the compulsory education age to be equivalent to the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2015
Enforcement	Provide training on the worst forms of child labor to labor law enforcement officials.	2013 – 2015
	Increase resources, the number of labor inspectors, and criminal investigators to enforce laws against child labor and provide immediate victim assistance.	2009 – 2015
	Make publicly available information on labor inspection funding; the number and type of labor inspections conducted; whether routine inspections are targeted; and the number of labor and criminal law inspections and investigations, prosecutions, convictions, and penalties related to child labor, including its worst forms.	2009 – 2015
	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating routine inspections rather than performing inspections solely based on complaints received.	2015

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms (cont)

	_	
Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Establish a mechanism to coordinate enforcement actions between labor and criminal law enforcement agencies.	2015
	Increase the resources available to law enforcement officials to efficiently track child labor cases.	2015
Coordination	Ensure the Departmental Monitoring and Coordination Working Group for Child Protection carries out its responsibilities related to the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2015
	Take measures to coordinate efforts at the national level to eliminate duplicative activities, committees, and actors at the local level.	2013 – 2015
	Analyze the data received from national information management systems and disseminate results nationwide.	2013 – 2015
Government Policies	Fund and implement the NAP.	2010 – 2015
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Education Sector Action Plan and the PRSP.	2010 – 2015
Social Programs	 Increase access to education by: Eliminating school-related fees, Ensuring school administrators and teachers allow children without birth certificates to attend school, Taking measures to ensure children with disabilities have access to regular schools, and Ensuring the safety of children in schools. 	2010 – 2015
	Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in domestic work, commercial sexual exploitation, and agriculture, and monitor the progress of these programs.	2010 – 2015

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