

In 2015, Gabon made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government improved its enforcement efforts by conducting unannounced inspections, initiating prosecutions for violators, and making its law enforcement statistics publicly available. However, children in Gabon are engaged in child labor, including in domestic work, and in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. The Government lacks prohibitions against the use of children in illicit activities, and does not criminally prohibit slavery, or the use of children for pornographic performances. Additionally, the Government cut funding to the Interministerial Committee for the Fight Against Child Trafficking and social programs to address child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Gabon are engaged in child labor, including in domestic work. Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.(1-7) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Gabon. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	22.3 (83,073)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	94.4
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	23.3
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(8)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children’s Work Project’s analysis of statistics from Deuxième Enquête Démographique et de Santé au Gabon (EDSG-II) Survey, 2012.(9)

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	Fishing,* including the production and sale of smoked fish (2, 10)
Industry	Mining,* including in sand quarries* (2)
	Working in brick factories* (2)
Services	Domestic work (2-4, 10, 11)
	Street vending, including cleaning market spaces at night* and carrying heavy loads (1, 2, 10, 12)
	Garbage scavenging* (2)
	Working in transportation* and as mechanics (2, 7, 13-15)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in markets or restaurants,* handicraft shops,* mining,* farming,* animal husbandry,* fishing,* domestic work, and as mechanics,* each sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (5, 7, 16, 17)
	Commercial sexual exploitation* sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2, 5-7, 12)

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

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

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Gabon is primarily a destination and transit country for victims of child trafficking from other countries in Central and West Africa.(3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 15-19) Boys in Gabon are forced to work as street vendors or mechanics, while girls are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation, domestic work, and work in markets and restaurants.(3, 7, 16, 17) There is limited evidence of child trafficking occurring within Gabon.(16, 20)

The Law on General Education guarantees the right to free and compulsory education.(21) Although the Government has taken measures to increase access to education, including by passing Decree N° 243/PR/MASNBE to authorize the free distribution of school textbooks, in practice, students were often required to pay for supplies and school fees, which may be prohibitive.(15, 22-24) The country also suffers from a shortage of schools and teachers, particularly in rural areas, and the school year has occasionally been disrupted by prolonged teacher strikes.(15, 22-29) Reports suggest that some children, especially girls, are sexually abused at school.(5, 15, 30) The lack of schools and teachers, safe learning environments, and associated costs may hinder access to education and make children more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

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	✓

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

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 177 of the Labor Code; Article 2 of Decree N° 0651/PR/MTEPS Establishing Individual Exceptions to the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (31-34)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 177 of the Labor Code (31-32)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations and/or Activities for Children	Yes		Article 177 of the Labor Code; Decree N° 275 of 1962 (31, 32)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 4 of the Labor Code; Articles 3, 11–14, and 20 of Law N° 09/04 Preventing and Fighting Against Child Trafficking (31, 36)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 3, 11–14, and 20 of Law N° 09/04 Preventing and Fighting Against Child Trafficking; Decree N° 0031/PR/MTEEF on Children's Work; Ordinance N° 4/2001 (7, 36-38)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 260, 261, and 263 of the Penal Code (39)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	20	Act N° 004/98 (40)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 1 of the Constitution; Article 2 of Act N° 21/2011 on General Education; Article 344.8 of the Penal Code (21, 39, 41, 42)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Free Public Education	Yes		Articles 1.18 and 1.19 of the Constitution; Article 2 of Act N° 21/2011 on General Education (41, 42)

* No conscription (40, 43)

Article 2 of Decree N° 0651/PR/MTEPS Establishing Individual Exceptions to the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment permits children under age 16 to perform light work with parental permission. However, it does not set a minimum age for light work or include a list specifying the kinds of light work allowed.(34) The ILO Committee of Experts has also expressed concern over this gap in the law.(44)

Laws related to forced labor are not sufficient, as slavery, and child trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation are not criminally prohibited.(17, 31, 36, 39) The law also does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, as the production of pornography and procuring, offering, or benefitting from the use of children for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited.(39)

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 Employment (MLE)	Receive, investigate, and address child labor complaints through its inspectors.(2) Maintain a helpline for victims of child trafficking that provides monitoring, counseling, and information services. Oversee the procedure for returning victims of child trafficking and exploitation to their families.(16, 45, 46) Refer cases of child trafficking to the Ministry of the Interior's Police Force for investigation and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW) for social services.(10, 47)
Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW)	Provide social services and assistance to vulnerable children; assist in repatriation or resettlement processes for victims of child trafficking; operate shelters for victims of child trafficking.(10)
Ministry of the Interior's Police Force	Investigate child labor law violations and refer cases to the Ministry of Justice for prosecution.(2, 48)
Ministry of Justice	Enforce child labor laws by prosecuting child labor complaints.(2, 22) Assist in supporting victims of child trafficking while prosecutors and investigators prepare their case.(10)
Local Vigilance Committees	Administered by the Interministerial Committee for the Fight Against Child Trafficking (CNSLTE). Monitor potential cases of child exploitation and human trafficking at the local level. Identify and intercept children at risk of child trafficking and coordinate assistance to children in need.(2, 15, 16, 38, 46, 48) In November 2015, raised awareness about Gabon's prohibitions of hazardous activities for children in conjunction with the establishment of two new committees.(2, 17)

Labor Law Enforcement

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

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown* (49)	\$0 (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown* (49)	Unknown* (2)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (49)	No (2)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (49)	Yes (49)
■ Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A	N/A
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	No (2)
Number of Labor Inspections	Unknown (49)	24 (2)
■ Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown	Unknown
■ Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown	Unknown

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (cont)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	17 (49)	24 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	3 (49)	10 (2)
■ Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown	Unknown (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	No (49)	Yes (2)
■ Routine Inspections Targeted	No (49)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (31, 32)	Yes (31, 32, 50)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	No (49)	Yes (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (16)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (49)	Yes (2)

*The Government does not make this information publicly available.

In 2015, through the Interministerial Committee for the Fight Against Child Trafficking (CNSLTE), the Government employed approximately 350 social workers, labor inspectors, police officers, and others to combat child exploitation.(2) Although the CNSLTE reports the number of inspectors is sufficient in urban areas, research indicates that it may be insufficient in rural areas.(2, 22, 33) According to the ILO's recommendation of 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Gabon should employ roughly 53 inspectors in order to adequately enforce labor laws throughout the country.(51-53) In principle, the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MLE) sends newly hired labor inspectors to Cameroon for a one-time training at the Regional African Center for Administration Work, but the Government lacked the budget to do so in 2015.(24, 49) In an effort to improve its enforcement in the informal sector, labor inspectors conducted at least 10 unannounced inspections and found children working as street vendors and mechanics. The MLE refers victims to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW) for appropriate services.(2)

The MLE does not have a specific line item in its budget for inspections, although the CNSLTE is able to allocate some of its funds to ministries to fund specific actions such as labor inspections.(2) The country's heavily forested terrain in rural areas and a lack of resources such as transportation, fuel, and office supplies limits inspectors' ability to conduct investigations.(2, 16, 17, 54) Additionally, labor inspectors in Gabon are tasked with reconciling labor disputes, which may detract from their primary duties of inspection and monitoring. The ILO Committee of Experts has also expressed concern over this gap in the law.(54)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2015, criminal law enforcement agencies in Gabon 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	Unknown
■ Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A	N/A
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown	No (2, 17)
Number of Investigations	16 (10, 49, 55)	15 (2, 17, 47)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown* (10)	Unknown
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	1 (10, 49, 55)	11 (2, 7, 17, 47)
Number of Convictions	0 (44)	0 (2, 17)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (10, 49)	Yes (2, 17, 50)

*The Government does not make this information publicly available.

Like labor inspectors, investigators do not have a dedicated budget to carry out their work, and the lack of resources such as transportation and fuel hindered their ability to conduct investigations.(2) Additionally, the UN has noted that prosecution of child trafficking cases can be difficult since the Criminal Court meets infrequently.(15) The Government, with the assistance of a local NGO, identified 25 victims of child trafficking in 15 cases during the reporting period and referred them to social services providers.(17, 47) Investigations into these cases resulted in initiation of legal proceedings in 11 cases, which are all currently ongoing.(2, 17) The MHSW assisted in the repatriation of 14 of the victims.(17)

Although law enforcement officials did not receive additional training in 2015, the Government provided training for social workers on how to deal with human trafficking victims through the CNSLTE.(17) Approximately 450 Gabonese peacekeepers received training on human trafficking prior to their deployment in the Central African Republic as part of the UN Support Mission for the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).(17) It is not clear how many cases of exploitative child labor were identified as a result of calls made to the MLE’s hotline for child trafficking victims.(16, 45, 56)

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

The Government has established a mechanism 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
Interministerial Committee for the Fight Against Child Trafficking (CNSLTE)	Coordinate national efforts against child trafficking and other worst forms of child labor by facilitating communication and coordinating enforcement actions among ministries. Led by the MLE and includes the Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior, MHSW, law enforcement agencies charged with the protection of minors, and local NGOs.(2, 17, 24) Responsible for establishing Local Vigilance Committees and validated a manual on National Procedures to Support Victims of Child Trafficking, which defines the roles and responsibilities of service providers and government bodies.(15) Maintain provincial offices and centers for child trafficking victims. Remove children from exploitative labor situations, provide shelter, assist victims with prosecution, and repatriate victims when necessary.(2, 7, 20, 48, 56-58) In 2015, updated its action plan to combat child labor.(2)
National Observatory for Children’s Rights	Coordinate the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the promotion of children’s right to education and protection against all forms of exploitation and abuse.(15, 59)

In 2015, the CNSLTE’s dedicated budget was reduced from the previous year and was insufficient to fully implement its 2015 action plan. However, the CNSLTE continued to respond to complaints of child trafficking, refer victims to social services providers, and work with the courts to prosecute child trafficking violations during the reporting period.(2, 17) Research indicates that committee members occasionally use personal funds to assist victims.(2, 17) In addition, a lack of communication between ministries limited the Government’s ability to collect data on the prevalence of human trafficking issues.(17, 24)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 9. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
2015 Action Plan of the CNSLTE†	Aims to address the worst forms of child labor in five ways: (1) identifying and prosecuting those who use child labor, (2) building capacity to enforce laws against human trafficking, (3) advocating for maximum penalties to be applied to child labor violations, (4) harmonizing domestic laws with international standards, and (5) increasing cooperation with embassies of source countries for child trafficking victims. Led by the CNSLTE, assigns actions and a timeline to ministries and NGOs.(2) In 2015, identified and prosecuted child labor offenses and established two new vigilance committees.(2, 17)
National Manual of Procedures for the Care of Child Victims of Trafficking	Establishes a series of procedures to return victims of child trafficking to their country of origin or facilitate their integration into Gabon.(20)
Education Policy (2010–2020)*	Aims to make pre-primary education widely available, improve the quality of primary education throughout the country, and improve the quality of and access to secondary education.(42, 59, 60)
National Youth Policy of Gabon*	Aims to establish a department devoted to youth and strengthen the technical and operational capacities of existing ministries dealing with youth issues. Encourages youth participation in democratic practices by creating a National Youth Council and strengthening the existing Youth Parliament.(61) Improves the lives of youth by providing more professional opportunities, fostering patriotism, and developing good citizenship.(62-64)
UNDAF (2012–2016)*	Establishes six priority areas in alignment with the Millennium Development Goals: (1) promote sustained and diversified growth, (2) develop good infrastructure, (3) improve economic governance, (4) consolidate democratic governance, (5) promote decentralized government, and (6) promote human and social development.(65)

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

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

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In 2015, although the Government of Gabon adopted the 2015 Action Plan of the CNSLTE, research found no evidence of a general policy to address child labor. Additionally, the Government of Gabon drafted separate bilateral agreements with Benin, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, and Togo to combat child trafficking; however the agreements have not been signed by all parties.(3, 15, 23, 66)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2015, the Government 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
Global Action Plan on Child Labor Issues	USDOL-funded project implemented by the ILO in approximately 40 countries to support the priorities of the Roadmap for Achieving the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor by 2016, established by The Hague Global Child Labor Conference in 2010. Aims to strengthen legal protections and social services delivery for child domestic workers in Gabon.(67) In 2015, held a 3-day workshop to create a policy framework document on child domestic work. The framework has yet to be officially endorsed by the Government of Gabon.(4, 67)
Gabon Emergent Strategic Plan (2011–2016)†	Government program that outlines President Ali Bongo Ondimba’s vision for the country’s development, which includes a component on improving work conditions and eliminating child labor.(68, 69) Created a National Council for Education, Training, and Research, which is charged with evaluating the implementation of training opportunities, infrastructure projects, and availability of teaching resources.(14, 68)
Shelters for Children in Need†	Shelters in Libreville and Port-Gentil supported by the Government and civil society organizations that provide victims of child labor, child trafficking, and orphans and other vulnerable children with health care, education, financial support, psycho-social support, and reintegration services.(2, 7, 14, 16, 17, 19, 24, 48, 56, 70) The Government provides in-kind support, such as social workers, medical supplies, food, and office supplies.(2)
Repatriation Programs†	Overseen by the CNSLTE. Resettles children in their country of origin when possible or provides resettlement assistance in Gabon if repatriation is not possible.(7, 17, 71) If the country of origin is unable to provide financial restitution or support for victims of child trafficking, the Government of Gabon absorbs these costs.(17)
Birth Certificate Program†	Ministry of Interior and MHSW program to provide birth certificates to Gabonese citizens who were not registered at birth.(17)
Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program†	Government program, supported by foreign donors, to provide anti-trafficking in persons training to Gabonese peacekeepers as part of their preparation for deployment to the UN Support Mission for the Central African Republic (MINUSCA).(10, 55)
Decent Work Country Program (2013–2016)	Promotes decent work conditions with a focus on creating job opportunities for youth and promoting social protection.(72)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Gabon.

Although Gabon has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem.(2) Additionally, the main government-funded shelter in Libreville had its budget reduced from \$220,000 to \$76,000 during the reporting period.(17) Research indicates that the shelters in Libreville are unable to accommodate all identified trafficking victims and other vulnerable children.(47) The Government continued to support existing programs related to child labor in 2015, despite reducing funding for these programs.(2, 10)

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 Gabon (Table 11).

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the legal framework prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, including both the production and trafficking of drugs.	2009 – 2015
	Ensure that the legal framework for light work establishes a minimum age no younger than 13, determines the activities considered light work, and specifies the conditions under which light work may be undertaken.	2013 – 2015

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Establish criminal prohibitions for slavery, child trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, the production of child pornography, and procuring, offering, or benefitting from the use of children in pornographic performances.	2015
Enforcement	Ensure that the labor inspectorate receives dedicated funding to carry out inspections and that labor inspectors are able to carry out their primary duties of inspection and monitoring throughout the country, including in rural areas.	2009 – 2015
	Authorize the inspectorate to assess penalties.	2014 – 2015
	Institutionalize training for labor inspectors, including by training new investigators at the beginning of their employment and providing refresher courses.	2014 – 2015
	Make statistics publicly available regarding the enforcement of child labor laws, including the type of inspections conducted, the number of criminal violations found, and penalties collected.	2009 – 2015
Enforcement	Establish a mechanism to log all calls to the MLE's child protection hotline and track cases of child labor for referral to law enforcement or social services providers.	2014 – 2015
	Ensure that the CNSLTE has sufficient funds to carry out its mandate, including improving communication and coordination among ministries.	2013 – 2015
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into existing policies.	2014 – 2015
	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant forms of child labor, such as domestic work, work in transportation, and commercial sexual exploitation.	2015
	Sign agreements with origin countries to combat child trafficking.	2014 – 2015
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the specific activities carried out by children working in agriculture, industry, and the informal sector to inform policies and programs.	2014 – 2015
	Ensure children have access to education by eliminating school fees, increasing the number of teachers and schools in rural areas, avoiding prolonged disruptions to the academic calendar due to strikes, and ensuring schools are free from sexual abuse.	2010 – 2015
	Expand existing programs to address the scope of the child labor problem.	2010 – 2015

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- of ILO Convention No. 81 calls for a “sufficient number” of inspectors to do the work required. As each country assigns different priorities of enforcement to its inspectors, there is no official definition for a “sufficient” number of inspectors. Amongst the factors that need to be taken into account are the number and size of establishments and the total size of the workforce. No single measure is sufficient but in many countries the available data sources are weak. The number of inspectors per worker is currently the only internationally comparable indicator available. In its policy and technical advisory services, the ILO has taken as reasonable benchmarks that the number of labor inspectors in relation to workers should approach: 1/10,000 in industrial market economies; 1/15,000 in industrializing economies; 1/20,000 in transition economies; and 1/40,000 in less developed countries.
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