

In 2016, Cambodia made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government adopted the National Plan of Action on Worst Forms of Child Labor and approved guidelines for addressing child labor in the fisheries sector. The Government also established standardized inspection guidelines to increase the effectiveness of child labor law enforcement. However, children in Cambodia perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. Due to challenges in accessing basic education and the absence of a compulsory education requirement, children are vulnerable to involvement in the worst forms of child labor. Inadequate resources and training hamper the labor inspectorate's capacity to enforce child labor laws, especially in rural areas and in risk-prone sectors.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Cambodia perform dangerous tasks in agriculture. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation.(1-5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Cambodia.

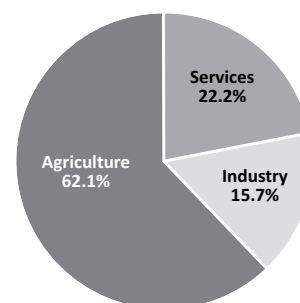
Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

| Children | Age | Percent |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------------|
| Working (% and population) | 5 to 14 | 9.4 (276,583) |
| Attending School (%) | 5 to 14 | 85.4 |
| Combining Work and School (%) | 7 to 14 | 9.1 |
| Primary Completion Rate (%) | | 95.2 |

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(6)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Labour Force and Child Labour Survey, 2012.(7)

Figure 1. Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14



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 deep-sea† and night fishing† (1, 8, 9) |
| | Peeling shrimp and shucking crabs (8, 10, 11) |
| | Production of tobacco, cassava, rubber, and rice (2, 9) |
| | Growing, cutting, carrying, and spraying pesticides† on sugarcane (3, 4, 12-14) |
| | Logging† for the production of timber (1) |
| Industry | Making bricks,† including feeding clay into brick-making machines, drying bricks, transporting bricks to the oven,† and loading bricks onto trucks (1, 2, 15-18) |
| | Production of salt (2, 19) |
| | Construction,† including operating transportation equipment† (1, 20) |
| | Production of textiles, including bleaching,† dyeing,† and finishing with chemicals;† garments; and footwear (1, 21-23) |
| | Production of alcoholic beverages† (1) |
| | Work in slaughterhouses† for the production of meat† (1) |
| | Manufacturing of wood and metal† products (1, 2) |

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

| Sector/Industry | Activity |
|---|---|
| Services | Domestic work (1, 24, 25) |
| | Work as security guards† and in entertainment,† including as bartenders,† masseurs,† dancers,† and waiters† (1) |
| | Street work, including begging, vending, scavenging, and collecting garbage (2, 20) |
| | Work as garbage pickers in dumpsites (26, 27) |
| Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡ | Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2, 5, 12, 28) |
| | Street vending as a result of human trafficking (29) |
| | Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking (20) |
| | Forced labor in the production of bricks (18, 20) |

† 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.




Children are trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, primarily from Cambodia to Thailand, from Vietnam to Cambodia, and within Cambodia.(5, 30) Children are also trafficked domestically, from rural to urban areas, and internationally, to countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, for forced labor in domestic service, begging, and street vending.(31) In Cambodian brick factories, some children engage in hazardous labor to offset family debt to employers.(18, 32)

Although the Education Law establishes free basic education, children may be charged additional school-related fees that are prohibitive for some families.(2, 20, 33) Other barriers to education include limited transportation to schools in remote areas, lack of drinking water and toilet facilities in some schools, and language barriers and an insufficient number of teachers for ethnic minority children.(2, 20, 25)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Cambodia 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). However, gaps exist in Cambodia’s legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

| Standard | Meets International Standards: Yes/No | Age | Legislation |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----|---|
| Minimum Age for Work | No | 15 | Article 177 of the Labor Law (34) |
| Minimum Age for Hazardous Work | Yes | 18 | Articles 173 and 177 of the Labor Law; Regulation on the Prohibition of Hazardous Child Labor; Articles 339–340 of the Penal Code (34-36) |

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

| Standard | Meets International Standards: Yes/No | Age | Legislation |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----|--|
| Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children | Yes | | Article 2 of the Regulation on the Prohibition of Hazardous Child Labor (35) |
| Prohibition of Forced Labor | Yes | | Articles 15–16 of the Labor Law; Articles 10, 12, 15–17, and 19 of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (34, 37) |
| Prohibition of Child Trafficking | Yes | | Articles 10, 12, 15–17, and 19 of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation (37) |
| Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children | No | | Articles 15, 28, 33–37, and 41 of the Law on Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation; Articles 284, 289, and 346 of the Penal Code (36, 37) |
| Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities | Yes | | Article 345 of the Penal Code; Articles 3 and 47 of the Law on Control of Drugs (36, 38) |
| Minimum Age for Military Recruitment | | | |
| State Compulsory | Yes | 18 | The Law on General Statutes for the Military Personnel of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (39, 40) |
| State Voluntary | Yes | 18 | Article 42 of the Law on General Statutes for the Military Personnel of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (39, 40) |
| Non-state Compulsory | No | | |
| Compulsory Education Age | No | | |
| Free Public Education | Yes | | Article 31 of the Education Law (41) |

In 2016, the Government of Cambodia adopted the Juvenile Justice Act, which stipulates that minors held in detention must not be subjected to forced labor.(42)

The Labor Law's minimum age protections do not apply to domestic or household workers, which leaves children vulnerable to child labor in this occupation.(34, 43) Laws do not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation of children, as the use or offering of a child for pornographic performances is not criminally prohibited. In addition, laws do not prohibit the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.

Education is free, but not compulsory, through grade nine.(41) The lack of compulsory schooling makes children under age 15 particularly vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to be in school but are not yet 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). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

| Organization/Agency | Role |
|---|---|
| Department of Child Labor, Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MOLVT) | Enforce child-related provisions of the Labor Law and train Commune Committees for Women and Children that oversee local child labor monitoring systems.(44) Includes 24 MOLVT interdepartmental inspection teams.(25) |
| Cambodian National Police Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department | Enforce laws against human trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children, in collaboration with municipal and provincial anti-human trafficking and juvenile protection offices. Commanded by the Ministry of the Interior.(20, 45) Field complaints about human trafficking, which can be filed through the anti-human trafficking hotline.(28) |
| Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation (MOSAVY) | Accompany the police on investigations and refer victims of the worst forms of child labor to NGO services.(8) |

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2016, labor law enforcement agencies in Cambodia 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 | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|--------------|----------------|
| Labor Inspectorate Funding | Unknown | \$197,200 (46) |
| Number of Labor Inspectors | 408 (47) | 499 (20) |
| Number of Child Labor Dedicated Inspectors | 58 (47) | 58 (20) |
| Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Training for Labor Inspectors | | |
| Initial Training for New Employees | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor | Yes (47) | N/A (20) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Number of Labor Inspections | 8,181 (47) | 10,985 (20) |
| Number Conducted at Worksite | 2,713 (47) | 6,518 (20) |
| Number Conducted by Desk Reviews | 5,468 (47) | 4,467 (20) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations Found | Unknown (47) | 230 (20) |
| Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed | Unknown (47) | 23 (20) |
| Number of Penalties Imposed that Were Collected | Unknown (47) | Unknown (20) |
| Routine Inspections Conducted | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Routine Inspections Targeted | No (47) | Yes (20) |
| Unannounced Inspections Permitted | Yes (47) | No (20) |
| Unannounced Inspections Conducted | Yes (47) | N/A (20) |
| Complaint Mechanism Exists | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |

In 2016, the Department of Child Labor (DOCL) employed 33 inspectors based in Phnom Penh and 1 child labor inspector in each of Cambodia's 25 provinces.⁽⁴⁷⁾ During the reporting period, the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training (MOLVT) developed and implemented standardized guidelines for conducting child labor inspections; however, the DOCL did not receive any funding for child labor-specific operations.⁽²⁰⁾ Although research indicates that the majority of child laborers reside in rural areas and work in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors, child labor inspections are concentrated in the city of Phnom Penh and in formal-sector factories producing goods for export, such as textiles and garments.^(1, 20, 48)

The MOLVT has established regulations on hazardous work for children in several sectors, including in agriculture, brickmaking, fishing, tobacco, and cassava production; however, inadequate training limits the capacity of local level authorities to enforce these regulations.^(44, 49, 50) For example, in December, MOLVT inspectors visited various brick factories but found no child labor violations, despite numerous reports of children working in brick factories. In addition, sanctions for labor violations, including those related to child labor, are rarely imposed in accordance with the law.^(25, 48)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2016, criminal law enforcement agencies in Cambodia 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 | 2015 | 2016 |
|--|----------|--------------|
| Training for Investigators | | |
| Initial Training for New Employees | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor | Yes (47) | N/A (20) |
| Refresher Courses Provided | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |
| Number of Investigations | 33 (47) | Unknown (20) |
| Number of Violations Found | 73 (47) | 46 (20) |

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

| Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement | 2015 | 2016 |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Number of Prosecutions Initiated | Unknown (47) | Unknown (20) |
| Number of Convictions | Unknown (47) | Unknown (20) |
| Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services | Yes (47) | Yes (20) |

In 2016, there were 15 to 20 Anti-Trafficking Police officers stationed in each of Cambodia's 25 provinces. During the reporting period, the Anti-Human Trafficking and Juvenile Protection Department (AHTJP) trained 108 police officers on relevant topics, including commercial sexual exploitation of children and child victim interview techniques.(20) The National Committee for Counter Trafficking, in collaboration with NGOs, also provided training on human trafficking to 1,380 law enforcement officials.(20) The Ministry of Interior, however, has not yet introduced anti-human trafficking training into the curriculum of the Cambodian National Police academies.(51, 52)

According to the AHTJP, police rescued 230 children engaged in the worst forms of child labor in the first 9 months of 2016. The Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation also identified 200 potential child trafficking victims, the majority of whom had been forced to beg or sell lottery tickets in Vietnam, and referred them to social services providers.(20)

In Cambodia, judges have discretion to determine whether perpetrators of crimes related to the worst forms of child labor will be imprisoned or fined, as well as the amount of the fine. In part, due to high levels of corruption within the judicial system, the penalties imposed are not uniformly administered and do not adhere to the parameters prescribed by law.(8, 31, 53)

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 all its worst forms (Table 8).

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

| Coordinating Body | Role & Description |
|--|--|
| National Committee on Child Labor of the Cambodian National Council for Children | Coordinate child labor issues at the national level. Ensure that projects and programs follow the National Plan of Action on child labor. Includes concerned ministries, businesses, trade unions, and NGOs. Oversee Provincial Committees on the Protection of Child Rights and Provincial Committees on Child Labor.(54) |
| National Committee for Counter Trafficking | Coordinate government, civil society, and private sector efforts to address human trafficking. Focuses on prevention; protection, recovery, reintegration, and repatriation; law enforcement; justice; international cooperation; children's affairs; and migration.(55) Chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Ministry of Interior, with 4 vice chair ministries and 14 participating ministries.(55) Oversee Provincial Committees for Counter Trafficking (PCCT) in each province.(52) In 2016, five additional PCCTs developed provincial plans of action and received funding for anti-human trafficking activities.(32) |

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor[†]

| Policy | Description |
|---|--|
| National Plan of Action on Worst Forms of Child Labor (2016–2025) [†] | Aims to build the capacity of law enforcement officers, strengthen the enforcement of relevant laws, raise public awareness of child labor issues, and enhance child labor monitoring systems at the community level.(20) |
| National Policies on the Elimination of Child Labor in the Fisheries Sector | Two policies aimed at addressing child labor in the fisheries sector, including the National Plan of Action to Tackle Child Labor in Inland and Coastal Fisheries and the Action Plan for Gender Equality Promotion and Child Labor Elimination in the Fisheries Sector. These policies seek to prevent and withdraw children from child labor and promote increased access to education and livelihood opportunities.(56, 57) In 2016, the Fisheries Administration approved Guidelines on Child Labor in the Fisheries Sector, which specify actions needed to eliminate child labor in fishing.(58) |
| Policy on Childhood Development and Protection in the Agricultural Sector (2016–2020) | Establishes a strategic framework to protect children working in the agricultural sector. Goals include preventing and reducing child labor, especially in hazardous work, and improving agricultural vocational training for youth ages 15 through 17.(9) |

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Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor[†] (cont)

| Policy | Description |
|--|---|
| National Plan of Action on the Suppression of Human Trafficking, Smuggling, Labor, and Sexual Exploitation (2014–2018) | Aims to prevent and eliminate all forms of human trafficking, including by strengthening labor law enforcement to protect children from exploitation in entertainment venues; integrating anti-human trafficking and child safety issues into the public school curriculum; and promoting the inclusion of vulnerable children in both formal and informal education.(55) |
| The Education Strategic Plan (2014–2018) | Seeks to ensure equitable access to education and to improve the education system’s response to human trafficking and child labor.(59) In 2016, the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport approved the Child Friendly Schools guidelines on tackling child labor, which will be implemented nationwide. (60) |
| National Social Protection Strategy (2011–2015) | Aims to expand access to healthcare, nutrition, and educational services, and to promote the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.(46, 61) In 2016, MOSAVY finalized an updated strategy, which is awaiting final approval.(46) |

[†] Policy was approved during the reporting period.

[‡] The Government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (62-66)

Many poor households in rural communities struggle to access the services provided by the National Social Protection Strategy. Insufficient access to a social protection safety net increases the vulnerability of children to involvement in child labor as a means to supplement family income.(67)

The Government has not specifically included child labor elimination and prevention strategies in the National Employment Policy and the Multilingual Education National Action Plan.(68, 69)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, 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. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor[†]

| Program | Description |
|--|---|
| Commune Committees for Women and Children [†] | MOLVT and provincial government advisory entities that raise awareness about child labor regulations, promote school attendance, collaborate with provincial labor departments to monitor for child labor violations, and refer children at risk of or engaged in child labor to protection services.(20, 44, 70) |
| Cambodians EXCEL: Eliminating Exploitative Child Labor through Education and Livelihoods (2012–2016) | \$10 million, USDOL-funded, 4-year project to combat child labor in agriculture, fishing, and domestic service. Provided educational services to a total of 29,755 child laborers and at-risk children and livelihoods support services to 14,291 households.(67) In 2016, contributed to the finalization and approval of the National Plan of Action on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.(60) Additional information is available on the USDOL Web site . |
| Cambodia Countering Trafficking in Persons (2015–2019) | \$8.5 million, USAID-funded, 4-year program implemented by Winrock International to strengthen the capacity of government and community stakeholders to prevent human trafficking, protect at-risk populations, and increase the number of successful prosecutions of perpetrators.(71, 72) |
| Better Factories Cambodia | USDOL, Government of Cambodia, Garment Manufacturers in Cambodia, and ILO-funded program to monitor garment factories’ compliance with national and international labor standards, including those related to child labor.(73) In 2016, identified 16 underage workers in garment factories. In 12 of the 16 cases, factories agreed to participate in a remediation program.(73) Additional information is available on the USDOL Web site . |
| UN WFP Country Program (2011–2018) | Multi-government and private sector-funded, 8-year program implemented in collaboration with the Government of Cambodia that includes a school feeding program for children in need. In 2016, provided food assistance to 29,120 people.(74) |

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

[‡] The Government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms.(75)

Although Commune Committees for Women and Children serve an important role in awareness raising and child labor monitoring at the local level, these committees are underfunded and have insufficient technical capacity to facilitate provision of adequate social protection services to children involved in or at risk of child labor.(70)

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 Cambodia (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 law's minimum age provisions apply to children working as domestic workers. | 2009 – 2016 |
| | Ensure that laws criminally prohibit the offering and use of a child for pornographic performances. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under 18 by non-state armed groups. | 2016 |
| | Institute a compulsory education age that is at a minimum equal to the minimum age for work. | 2009 – 2016 |
| Enforcement | Collect and publicly release data on the number of penalties collected for child labor violations and on the number of investigations, prosecutions, and convictions for crimes related to the worst forms of child labor. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Provide sufficient resources for the enforcement of child labor laws to ensure that inspections are conducted throughout the country, especially in rural areas and in the informal sector. | 2010 – 2016 |
| | Strengthen the labor inspectorate by initiating targeted inspections based on analysis of data related to risk-prone sectors and patterns of serious incidents. | 2009 – 2016 |
| | Strengthen the labor inspection system by permitting and conducting unannounced inspections. | 2016 |
| | Build the capacity of local-level authorities to enforce child labor regulations, including in agriculture, tobacco, cassava, and fishing. | 2012 – 2016 |
| | Increase anti-human trafficking training for law enforcement officers, including at Cambodian National Police academies. | 2014 – 2016 |
| Government Policies | Uniformly administer penalties for violations of laws on child labor, including its worst forms, in accordance with the parameters prescribed by law. | 2009 – 2016 |
| | Expand coverage of the National Social Protection Policy in rural areas to ensure that poor children and their families have access to services that may mitigate the risk of involvement in child labor. | 2016 |
| Social Programs | Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the Multilingual Education National Action Plan and the National Employment Policy. | 2015 – 2016 |
| | Increase access to free basic education by eliminating unofficial school fees and addressing issues related to limited transportation, inadequate school infrastructure, insufficient number of teachers, and language barriers. | 2013 – 2016 |
| | Increase funding and enhance training for Commune Committees for Women and Children to enhance child labor monitoring and social services provision at the subnational level. | 2016 |

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- see “Children’s Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions” in the Reference Materials section of this report.
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