

Bahrain

In 2011, Bahrain made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In March 2012, Bahrain ratified ILO Convention 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment. Although the worst forms of child labor do not appear widespread, the country has yet to address remaining gaps in the legal framework regarding hazardous work and domestic service that place children at risk of exploitative work. The current minimum age for hazardous work is below the age recommended in international standards. In addition, the Labor Law explicitly exempts domestic servants from all provisions in the law, and the ILO Committee of Experts has noted that this exemption may leave such workers unprotected from labor abuses.

Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate		Unavailable

Sources:

Primary completion rate: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Although there is no evidence to suggest that the problem is widespread, some children in Bahrain are engaged in the worst forms of child labor.(3, 4) Children are engaged in domestic service in Bahrain, some as a result of trafficking.(3-5) Children employed as domestics may work long hours and are isolated in private homes where they are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(6) Children are also victims of commercial sexual exploitation, in some cases through trafficking.(5, 7, 8) Cases have been recorded of trafficking of children from Bangladesh and India.(7, 9, 10) Limited evidence suggests that children are sometimes involved in begging on the streets.(11) Children working on the streets are vulnerable to severe weather, traffic accidents and crime.(12)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Law sets the minimum age for work at age 14 and the minimum age for hazardous work at age 16.(13, 14)



Children ages 14 to 16 must obtain authorization to work from the Ministry of Labor (MOL) and must complete a medical examination prior to employment.(13) The Government has stated that, in practice, work permits are only issued for children under age 15 in cases of apprenticeships and for work during summer holidays.(11) In addition, all workers must be registered with the Social Insurance Organization, which does not accept registration for children under age 18. This requirement is reported to encourage a minimum age for work of 18 in practice.(15) In March 2012, Bahrain ratified ILO Convention 138 concerning the minimum age for admission to employment.(8)

The requirements to obtain medical examination and authorization from MOL prior to work are waived for minors ages 14 to 16 working in enterprises that only employ family members.(13) The Government reports that work by children on family farms is almost nonexistent.(11) The lack of preauthorization requirements for children working with their families may expose children working in other types of family businesses to hazardous situations.

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓
	Minimum Age for Work	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	16
	Compulsory Education Age	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

The Labor Law prohibits night work and places restrictions on hours of work that minors may perform.(13) Ministerial Order No. 6 outlines a list of 25 types of hazardous work that minors under age 16 are prohibited from performing.(14) The Government has considered changes to the Labor Law to increase the minimum age for hazardous work to age 18.(14, 16) However, the current legal minimum age for hazardous work may be under the age recommended in international standards.(14)

The Government has issued Ministerial Orders requiring employers to maintain employment contracts with any domestic workers.(17, 18) However, the Labor Law explicitly exempts domestic servants from all provisions in the law, and the ILO Committee of Experts has noted that this exemption may leave such workers unprotected from labor abuses.(13, 14, 19) In addition, unlike other classes of migrant workers, migrant domestic servants continue to be required to obtain the permission of the employer that sponsored their travel to Bahrain to change employers.(20) This requirement increases domestic servants' vulnerability to forced labor.

The Vagrancy Act of 2007 prohibits adults from inciting children to beg.(11) The Constitution prohibits forced labor except in very specific cases such as national emergencies.(21) The minimum age for military service is age 18.(22) The 2008 Law to Combat Trafficking in Persons prohibits all forms of trafficking for the purposes of prostitution or any other forms of commercial sexual exploitation, forced labor or slavery.(19, 23) The Penal Code prohibits inciting a

child to engage in "immorality," which has been interpreted to cover pornography.(24, 25) It also prohibits both adult and child prostitution, including operating a brothel or using the services of a child prostitute.(24) The Code further states that any person who relies on prostitution or immorality for his or her livelihood will be punished with imprisonment. While penalizing adults who profit from child prostitution and pornography, this prohibition, in theory, may enable prosecution of children for involvement in such activities.(24, 25)

The Constitution mandates free and compulsory basic education.(21) Education is compulsory to age 15 and free to grade 12.(11, 16) The Government may impose fines in cases of truancy.(11, 26)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The Government of Bahrain has a National Committee on Childhood to protect children's rights under the authority of the newly renamed Ministry of Human Rights and Social Development (MOHRSD, formerly the Ministry of Social Development). The Committee was restructured in 2007 and serves to promote the educational, social, cultural, and psychological development of children.(11) However, research found no evidence of a government agency or other body tasked with coordinating government efforts to combat child labor specifically.(11) Nevertheless, the Government has established agencies to address trafficking. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs heads a committee to coordinate trafficking policies.(27)

The MOL and the Labor Market Regulatory Authority have responsibilities for enforcing child labor laws. These agencies have systems in place for sharing information on child labor cases, including referring cases to the judiciary when warranted.(8) MOL inspectors enforce child labor laws.(5) Some inspectors from the Labor Market Regulatory Authority also perform inspections, particularly concerning foreigners' work permits and working situations.(22) There are 43 MOL labor inspectors who investigate violations of the labor laws, including child labor.(5, 22) Labor inspectors have been trained on international child labor standards by the ILO.(8) Though these investigation and enforcement mechanisms exist, no information is available on inspections to enforce child labor laws during the period.(8)

The Ministry of the Interior is the lead agency responsible for enforcing criminal laws against the worst forms of child labor, such as those against trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Ministry coordinates actions with

the MOHRSD and the Public Prosecutor, as needed.(8) These agencies have processes in place for sharing information on such cases. The Ministry of the Interior’s Criminal Investigation Directorate oversees a 12-person unit that investigates potential cases of trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.(8) Although the Government conducted investigations into cases of prostitution during the reporting period, no information is available on the number of investigations or convictions involving minors in commercial sexual exploitation or trafficking during the reporting period.(8)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government has stated that the worst forms of child labor are not a significant problem in the country and, therefore, it has not allocated resources to develop a national action plan to combat child labor.(22, 28) The Labor Market Regulatory Authority has conducted research on migrant workers in the country.(19) Some migrant workers are involved in domestic service, and domestic servants are particularly vulnerable to labor abuses due to gaps in the legal framework.(5) There is no evidence, however, that the Government has conducted or participated in specific research to determine to what extent children are engaged in the worst forms of child labor.(8)

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government funds an NGO-run shelter, Dar Al Aman, which provides services for victims of trafficking, labor exploitation and commercial sexual exploitation, including children.(25, 27) The shelter provides legal, medical and psychological services.(27) The Government also supports the Bahrain Child Protection Center, which provides treatment and counseling to victims of sexual exploitation. Under the Vagrancy Act, the MOHRSD established the Social Welfare Dignity Home, which provides services to homeless persons and beggars, including children.(11) In 2011, the MOHRSD launched a toll-free hotline to report suspected child labor cases.(8)

The Government participates in a USDOS-funded program to combat trafficking that aims to build the capacity of government and other officials.(29, 30) The MOHRSD also supports a mobile library for children.(25) The impact of such a program on the worst forms of child labor does not appear to have been assessed. Furthermore, despite the programs described here, research found no evidence of outreach programs specifically aimed at protecting the rights of children involved in domestic service.

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Bahrain:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Enact revisions to the Labor Law to increase the minimum age for hazardous work to age 18 and ensure that these provisions apply to children in family businesses and domestic service.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Adopt legislation to provide protections for children engaged in domestic service, including abolishing requirements that migrant domestic workers have their employer’s permission to change jobs.	2010, 2011
	Amend the Penal Code to ensure that children exploited in prostitution and pornography are not treated as criminals.	2010, 2011
Coordination and Enforcement	Establish a mechanism to coordinate government efforts to combat child labor.	2009, 2011
	Make data on child labor law enforcement publicly available.	2009, 2011
Policies	Conduct research to determine the scope of children’s involvement in the worst forms of child labor in Bahrain.	2010, 2011
	Develop a national plan of action to address the worst forms of child labor in domestic service, commercial sexual exploitation and begging.	2009, 2010, 2011

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Social Programs	Assess the impact that the mobile library program has on the worst forms of child labor in Bahrain.	2010, 2011
	Develop outreach programs to protect the rights of children involved in domestic service.	2010, 2011

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