

# Guyana

In 2011, Guyana made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In collaboration with the ILO, the Government conducted a Child Labour Rapid Assessment Survey to gather current data on child labor. The Government also launched a program to reduce child labor and increase access to quality education in rural areas. The program includes components to improve numeracy and literacy, provide nutritional support and raise awareness among parents. However, Guyana still has legislative gaps and lacks a national action plan to combat child labor. Children in Guyana continue to engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in dangerous activities in agriculture and prostitution.

## Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	23.0 (44,787)
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	94.5
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	23.2
Primary Completion Rate		83.2

**Sources:**

**Primary completion rate:** Data from 2010, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012.(1)

**All other data:** Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from MICS3 Survey, 2006-2007.(2)

## Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Guyana are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in dangerous activities in agriculture and prostitution.(3-6) Children working in agriculture in Guyana may be exposed to hazards, including lifting and carrying heavy loads and working with pesticides.(4, 7)

Many Guyanese children work in domestic service and on the streets, typically as vendors or beggars.(6, 8-10) The practice of sending children from poor rural families to live with wealthier relatives or friends in urban areas sometimes results in domestic servitude.(11) Children employed as domestics may work long hours and are isolated in private homes, where they are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(12) Children working on the streets are vulnerable to severe weather, traffic accidents and crime.(13)

Commercial sexual exploitation of children is a problem in Guyana, including instances of forced



prostitution.(3, 5, 6, 14, 15) There are reports of girls as young as age 12 working as prostitutes.(14)

Although evidence is limited, reports indicate that some children work in other dangerous occupations, including fishing, construction, forestry, welding and mining, including gold mining.(3-6, 9, 16, 17) Children working in fishing are susceptible to risks such as drowning.(18) Children working in forestry are believed to engage in both logging and the preservation of lumber. Logging may require children to use dangerous tools and carry heavy loads, while preserving lumber can expose them to toxic chemicals.(8) In mines, children work with unsafe equipment and toxic substances.(3)

There is limited evidence that children are victims of both internal and international trafficking.(11, 19) Amerindian girls may be particularly vulnerable, as they are often trafficked to work in prostitution or domestic service.(15, 20)

## Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Guyana's Employment of Young Persons and Children Act and the Education Act both set the minimum age for employment at 15. Children younger than age 15 may be employed in family businesses or technical schools, provided such work is approved and supervised by the public authority.(3, 21, 22) The Act also prohibits the employment of children under age 18 in

industrial work at night and any work that may jeopardize their health, safety or morals. However, the law makes an exception for night work for children between ages 16 and 17 who are engaged in continuous work through day and night, including certain gold mining processes and the production of iron, steel, glass, paper and raw sugar.(21)

	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	15
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

Guyana's Occupational Safety and Health Act prohibits children under age 15 from working in factories and stipulates that persons under age 18 may be removed from factory work if authorities or inspectors determine that they are engaged in activities that are hazardous to their health or safety.(23) The Government has issued a list of 22 hazardous occupations and processes that could threaten the health, safety, moral or personal development of children. The list includes work such as mining, construction, factory work and certain agricultural activities.(4, 24) However, the list defines a child as any person under age 16. Therefore, children between ages 16 and 18 are not fully protected from engagement in hazardous work in all sectors.

In 2006, Guyana's Parliament passed an amendment to the Employment of Young Persons and Children Act that would have defined all the worst forms of child labor. However, the President did not sign the draft amendment into law, and Parliament has not resubmitted it.(5, 25) Other laws exist that protect children from some of the worst forms of child labor. The Constitution of Guyana prohibits forced labor.(26) Human trafficking is prohibited under the Combating of

Trafficking in Persons Act of 2005.(27) The trafficking law criminalizes child trafficking for exploitation in prostitution or pornography, but Guyana does not have legislation that addresses these issues outside a trafficking context. Though the Criminal Law Offences Act prohibits the selling, publishing and exhibiting of obscene material, it does not explicitly proscribe child pornography.(3, 5, 6, 28-30) Research found no evidence of other laws that would protect domestic servants or street children.

Guyana's Defense Act prohibits persons under age 18 from bearing arms as members of the Guyana Defense Force. Children may voluntarily enter the military at age 16 and serve as unarmed apprentices until age 18.(31, 32)

The Constitution of Guyana guarantees the right of free education from nursery school to the university level, including non-traditional schooling. The Education Act makes education compulsory to age 15.(22, 26, 33, 34)

### Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The Government of Guyana has established a National Steering Committee on Child Labor (NSCCL), tasked with recommending policies and programs to eliminate child labor in all its forms.(5) The NSCCL is a committee within the Ministry of Labor, Human Services and Social Security (MOLHSS). Membership includes the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, the Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Health, and the Guyana Police Force (GPF); the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs; the national Teacher's Union; and the University of Guyana are also represented.(35) However, the NSCCL has reportedly stopped meeting on a regular basis, potentially limiting its ability to carry out its mandates.(36)

Guyana also has a National Task Force for Combating Trafficking in Persons (NTFCTP), chaired by the Minister of Home Affairs.(3, 37) Other participants are drawn from MOLHSS and the Ministries of Legal Affairs, Foreign Affairs and Amerindian Affairs, as well as several NGOs. The NTFCTP is charged with reporting on the nature and magnitude of trafficking in persons in Guyana; documenting the Government's response and carrying out public education and prevention measures.(38) The NTFCTP meets monthly.(5)

MOLHSS collaborates with the Ministry of Education, the Guyana Forestry Commission, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, and the GPF to monitor and enforce child labor

laws. MOLHSS takes the lead on routine labor inspections and special investigations stemming from child labor complaints.(5) MOLHSS employs 17 labor inspectors. In 2011, they conducted over 4,000 workplace inspections, none of which revealed child labor violations.(5) Throughout the reporting period, MOLHSS also received several complaints of possible child labor, but targeted investigations revealed no violations.(5) It is unknown why inspections did not find any child labor violations. Though MOLHSS collects information on child labor cases, it does not make such data publicly available.(5)

Multiple agencies are responsible for the enforcement of criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor, including trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. The Ministry of Home Affairs, GPF, MOLHSS and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs can each play a role in prosecutions.(3) However, capacity to carry out prosecutions is limited. With only 43 justices and magistrates, the courts have a backlog of cases on all matters of law, with more than a 2-year waiting period.(5, 11, 19, 31)

## **Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor**

In 2005, the NSCCL prepared a draft outline of a national action plan to eliminate and prevent child labor.(4) However, research found no evidence that a policy to address child labor has been finalized or adopted.

Guyana's plan of action to combat human trafficking prioritizes educational and awareness-raising efforts, particularly in the country's interior.(15, 19)

Despite the legal guarantee of free education, some primary schools continue to charge fees.(34) However, the Government has implemented an education policy that aims to provide equal access to quality education for all children. Initiatives adopted under this policy seek to eliminate barriers to education, particularly for the poor.(33) The question of whether this policy has an impact on child labor does not appear to have been addressed.

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

The Government of Guyana is taking part in the 11-country, approximately \$21 million Tackle Child Labor through Education (TACKLE) project funded by the European Commission.(39-41) The program, originally set to end

in 2012, has received additional funding to run through September 2013.(5, 42) TACKLE's main objectives include providing access to basic education and skills training for disadvantaged children, and strengthening the capacity of local and national authorities to collaborate with civil society groups in the formulation, implementation and enforcement of policies to eliminate child labor.(43) In Guyana, a major aim of the project is to increase school attendance by targeting truancy and decreasing the school dropout rate, particularly among those vulnerable to child labor.(3, 44, 45) Strategies include student mentoring programs and awareness-raising campaigns.(46, 47)

As part of the TACKLE project, the Government undertook several efforts to target child labor during the reporting period. It launched a \$105,000 School Retention and Child Labor Prevention Program, which targets children living in rural areas. Program components include numeracy and literacy, nutrition support, provision of transportation, parenting workshops and psychological support.(5) The Government also conducted a Child Labour Rapid Assessment Survey with assistance from ILO.(45) However, the results of that survey have not yet been released to the public.

The Government of Guyana also participates in several initiatives to combat and prevent trafficking of children. MOLHSS distributes anti-trafficking awareness materials.(11) The Government also funds a shelter that houses abused and trafficked women and children for up to 6 months. The shelter provides services, including psychological counseling and practical skills training.(3, 5)

In accordance with the national education policy, the Government provides meals at school and free uniform programs for school children. These programs are particularly concentrated in the poorest regions.(5, 33, 47)

Though the Government is involved in efforts to combat child labor, efforts are not sufficient to reach all vulnerable children, particularly those engaged in prostitution, agriculture, domestic labor, street work and other hazardous occupations.

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

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Amend laws to prohibit all types of night work for children under age 18.	2010, 2011
	Amend the list of hazardous work to protect children under age 18 in all sectors.	2010, 2011
	Enact a law to explicitly prohibit child prostitution and child pornography.	2010, 2011
	Enact a law to provide protections for child domestic servants and street children.	2011
Coordination and Enforcement	Engage the NSCCL in regular meetings and coordination efforts.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Make information on child labor cases publicly available.	2011
	Dedicate more resources, namely judicial personnel, to resolving court cases, including those involving the worst forms of child labor.	2010, 2011
Policies	Finalize and adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.	2010, 2011
	Assess the impact of the national education policy on addressing child labor.	2010, 2011
	Expand education policy to achieve free universal education, as guaranteed by the Constitution.	2011
Social Programs	Make publicly available the results of the Child Labour Rapid Assessment Survey.	2011
	Develop new initiatives and expand existing programs to reach all children involved in the worst forms of child labor, particularly in prostitution, agriculture, domestic labor, street work and other hazardous occupations.	2010, 2011

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