

In 2014, Cameroon made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government created a National Steering Committee to combat child labor and adopted a National Action Plan against Child Labor and Trafficking in Persons. The Government also adopted a Decent Work Country Program that includes child labor issues and continued to support programs that increase access to education and health care. However, children in Cameroon are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. The Government has not ratified UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, nor has it prohibited the use of children in illicit activities, including the production and trafficking of drugs.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Cameroon are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture. Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation. (1-11) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Cameroon.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	56.2
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	79.7
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	52.7
Primary Completion Rate (%)		72.9

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2012, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(12)
 Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Enquête Démographique et de Santé et à Indicateurs Multiples, 2011.(13)

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 cocoa, bananas,* coffee,* palm oil,* rubber,* and tea,* including handling pesticides, machetes, clearing fields, and lifting heavy loads (1, 5-11)
	Raising livestock* (5, 9, 14)
Industry	Work in artisanal gold mines and gravel quarries,* transporting heavy loads of sand or gravel,* breaking stones,* and digging or standing in stagnant water to extract minerals* (1, 7, 15-17)
	Construction,* including carrying heavy loads of water,* concrete,* cement* and bricks* (1, 7)
Services	Domestic work (1, 7-9, 11, 18)
	Street work, including carrying heavy luggage,* vending,* and begging*(1, 7, 19)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation* sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2-4, 7, 20, 21)
	Forced labor in agriculture in the production of cocoa, tea, cotton, and onions, fishing, livestock raising, domestic work, artisanal gold mines and gravel quarries, street vending, and construction each sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (2, 3, 7, 21, 22)
	Forced begging* (6, 9, 23)

* 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

Cameroon

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

A 2010 pilot study by the ILO estimates that approximately 4,000 children between ages 11 and 17, mostly girls, were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation.(4, 21) In the urban informal sector, children carry heavy luggage and sell goods on the streets, such as cigarettes and water.(19, 21) In the three northern regions, it is a tradition to send boys, called *talibés*, to Koranic teachers to receive education. While some boys receive lessons, others are forced by their teachers to beg or perform other work and to surrender the money that they earn.(6, 9, 23) Cameroon is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking from neighboring countries in Central and West Africa and the Middle East.(2, 7, 21, 22) Improved public awareness about child trafficking has reduced the number of parents who willingly give their children to intermediaries promising education or a better life in an urban city. As a result, reports of children being kidnapped for human trafficking have increased, including in Yaoundé.(21) Victims of child trafficking are forced into domestic work, begging, vending, work in agriculture, fishing, mining, quarrying, or are subject to commercial sexual exploitation. (2, 7, 21, 22) Child trafficking also occurs internally for the purposes of hereditary slavery in the Northwest Region and the three northern regions, or for commercial sexual exploitation in southern Cameroon.(3, 7, 21, 24)




Although education is free in Cameroon, in practice, families must pay for uniforms, books, and other school-related fees.(1, 9, 25-28) The Ministry of Education offers fee waivers to disadvantaged primary students, but these waivers sometimes do not cover the costs or arrive late, which means that parents must still pay some out-of-pocket fees.(1, 29) In 2014, the Government claimed to have banned the collection of Parent-Teacher Association fees, although they were still collected in many areas; research did not find a publicly available copy of this decree.(30, 31) Girls were also subject to sexual harassment at schools and often dropped out due to early pregnancy or domestic responsibilities. A lack of schools in rural areas and birth registration requirements further hindered access to education, since many children are not born in formal health facilities, which issue the birth declarations necessary to obtain birth certificates.(9, 19, 27) This is particularly true in the Extreme North Region, where UNICEF estimates that approximately 65 percent of children do not have birth certificates.(21)

Additionally, ongoing insecurity along Cameroon’s borders with Nigeria and the Central African Republic has displaced many Cameroonians and strained the Government’s resources for addressing child labor.(31)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Cameroon has ratified most 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	14	Section 86 of the Labor Code (32)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 9-23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor; Section 86 of the Labor Code (32, 33)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations and/or Activities for Children	Yes		Articles 9-23 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor (33)

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

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 1-6 of Law N° 2011/024 Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery; Articles 292, 293 and 342 of the Penal Code; Section 2 of the Labor Code (32, 34, 35)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 1-6 of Law N° 2011/024; Articles 11, 352 and 353 of the Penal Code (34, 35)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 265, 343-347 of the Penal Code; Article 76 of Law N° 2010/12 on Cybersecurity and Cybercriminality (34, 36)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Article 2 of Decree N° 2001/187 Fixing the Conditions and Recruitment and Admission to Military Schools (37)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	11	Preamble of the Constitution; Articles 9 and 16 of Law N° 1998/004 Orienting the Education System (9, 38, 39)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 48 (2) of Presidential Decree N° 2001/041 (40)

* No conscription (37, 41)

While Order N° 017 on Child Labor sets a minimum age for hazardous work and prohibits certain occupations for children, the laws are not extended to children working in noncontractual employment.(33, 42) Additionally, Articles 20 and 21 of Order N° 017 on Child Labor prohibit hazardous activities for children under age 18, with two exceptions for those under age 16. This means children ages 16 to 17 can legally be employed in hazardous tasks such as operating horizontal winches or pulleys, servicing steam valves, and working on scaffolding.(33) Additionally, Law N° 1998/004 Orienting the Education System makes education compulsory through primary school, but it does not specifically establish a compulsory education age.(28, 43) Most children complete primary school around age 11, which makes children ages 12 to 14 particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor, as they are not required to be in school and are below the minimum age for work.(28, 32)

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 Social Security (MINLSS)	Lead efforts to enforce child labor laws, in cooperation with other government bodies, including the Ministries of Social Affairs; Justice; Women's Empowerment and Family; Territorial Administration and Decentralization; and Tourism.(1, 30) Primarily concerned with the welfare of vulnerable groups, including women, children, and indigenous groups. Advocate on behalf of victims, bring complaints to court, and provide social services to victims of child labor.(31)
Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Contribute to investigations through police and gendarmes and through prosecution of offenders as appropriate.(31, 44)
Ministry of National Security and Defense's National Gendarmerie (SED)	Enforce criminal laws against child trafficking and investigate violations of child labor laws throughout the country in both rural and urban areas.(30, 31)
General Delegate for National Security's Special Vice Squad (DGSN)	Enforce laws against the worst forms of child labor and investigate violations in urban areas.(30, 31)
Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization	Enforce child labor laws at the regional level. Local representatives may settle child labor disputes amicably or refer the case to the SED, DGSN or MOJ for further investigation and prosecution.(31)

Cameroon

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS)	Lead government efforts to combat human trafficking.(21) Provide social services and protection to victims of child trafficking, including education, vocational training, and shelter.(45, 46) Coordinate repatriation for victims of human trafficking in cooperation with the Ministry of External Relations.(21) In the case of the Directorate of Social Protection of the Child, oversee 10 regional delegations; the Operational Technical Unit provides social services and maintains Centers for Social Action.(45) In the case of the Minors Brigade, work within the public security sections of local police stations to investigate reports of child trafficking and the use of children in hazardous work.(6, 30, 44)
National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms	Promote and protect human rights and investigate human rights abuses.(30, 44) Report wrongdoing, advocate for victims, and assist victims of human trafficking with settling lawsuits.(31)
Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Family (MINPROFF)	Enforce criminal laws against forced child labor, commercial sexual exploitation, and use of children in illicit activities.(30)
Joint Mobile Brigade	Work to prevent and combat the phenomenon of street children in Yaoundé and Douala by identifying street children, providing temporary shelter, reintegrating them into their families, and educating families whose children have returned home on the root causes of the phenomenon to prevent these children from returning to the streets.(6, 14, 31)
Ministry of External Relations	Provide assistance in repatriating victims of child trafficking in cooperation with MINAS.(31)

Law enforcement agencies in Cameroon took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2014, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MINLSS) employed 74 labor inspectors, which is insufficient to enforce child labor laws, and significantly less than the 192 inspectors proscribed by its organizational chart.(30) The labor inspectors did not receive training on child labor during the reporting period, although they were educated about the ILO's core conventions during their initial training.(30) The ILO CEACR has also expressed concern that the inspectors are not sufficiently familiar with the labor laws.(1, 47) The Government, with support from UNICEF, developed a draft training curriculum on the rights of children for police and magistrates.(30, 31) It is not known what the MINLSS's budget was for 2014, but an official in the Southwest Region claimed he received approximately \$3,600 per year to conduct inspections, which was insufficient given the size of the geographic area under his jurisdiction.(30) Although inspectors have office facilities, they lack other resources and often do not have the vehicles or fuel needed to conduct inspections.(1, 21, 30)

Article 108 of the Labor Code allows inspectors to conduct unannounced visits, and the inspectors did conduct unannounced inspections via site visits in all the sectors allowed by law.(30, 32) However, a 2011 ILO review of Cameroon's labor inspectorate found that few workplace visits had occurred.(47) Article 109 of the Labor Code allows inspectors to take direct legal action and assess penalties for labor violations.(30, 32) The Government conducted inspections in 2014, but it did not publish the number of inspections that occurred, the number of violations found, or the penalties assessed.(30) Additionally, there is no formal referral mechanism between law enforcement and social services, although the authorities work together in practice to ensure that the victims of child labor violations receive the appropriate social services.(1)

Criminal Law Enforcement

It is not known how many investigators the Government employed to enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor in 2014.(30) A local NGO, Nkumu Fed Fed, partnered with the Government and Vital Voices to provide training on human trafficking for the Regional Taskforces on Trafficking in Persons established in 3 of 10 regions.(21) Research found that due to a lack of training, some magistrates and prosecutors were not familiar with Law N° 2011/024 Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery. As a result, many child trafficking cases were tried as other crimes, which have lesser penalties.(21, 30) Reports from the Northwest and Southwest Regional Taskforce on Trafficking in Persons reported at least 25 new cases of child trafficking and identified 17 victims. Of the 25 new cases, 11 defendants were prosecuted under Law N° 2011/024, and 8 were ultimately convicted.(21, 30) The Government did not provide any publicly available information on the total number of investigations conducted, prosecutions, convictions, or penalties assessed for the country as a whole.

The National Referral System established in 2013 refers victims of child trafficking to social service providers. Children who are employed in hazardous child labor outside of the home are also included in the National Referral System.(48) The System establishes the role and scope of the intervention of various players in providing assistance to victims in the short, medium, and long term.(21, 30) During the reporting period, the Government reintegrated 31 victims of child trafficking who were identified in 2013. NGOs identified at least 130 victims, most of whom were placed in shelters, were rehabilitated, or were reunited with their families.(21)

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

Although the Government has established the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) to coordinate its efforts to address human trafficking, research found no evidence of mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including all its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Steering Committee*	Coordinate government efforts to combat child labor and implement the National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children (PANETEC).(49, 50) Led by MINLSS.(49)
Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC)	Coordinate government efforts to combat trafficking in persons, including by training stakeholders, proposing legislation, and ratifying international instruments. The Secretary General of the Office of the Prime Minister chairs the Committee, which includes members of eight Ministries, law enforcement personnel, civil society organizations, and NGOs active in anti-trafficking work.(1, 21) In 2014, created three Regional Taskforces on Trafficking in Persons to serve as coordinating bodies at the regional level.(21)

* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

The IMC did not have its budget approved in 2014, which limited its ability to coordinate among stakeholders and provide oversight to the Regional Taskforces on Trafficking in Persons.(31) The three Regional Taskforces functioned at a grassroots level, although with inadequate funding, which limited their operational capacity.(21, 48)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Cameroon has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 7).

Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children (PANETEC) (2014-2016)	Aims to eradicate the worst forms of child labor by 2016. Targets the elimination of the use of children in illicit activities such as drug trafficking, recruitment of children in armed conflict, and commercial sexual exploitation.(30, 51) Establishes responsible agencies, actions to be taken, timelines, and concrete measures related to preventing child labor and child trafficking. In 2014, conducted awareness campaigns through Regional Taskforces and tightened adoption procedures to reduce the risk of adopted children from becoming victims of human trafficking.(21)
Trafficking in Persons Action Plan	Outlines efforts to prosecute and convict human trafficking offenders, to educate law enforcement personnel and social workers, to develop and enact legislation prohibiting the trafficking of adults, and to train enforcement personnel on how to use the human trafficking database.(52)
Decent Work Country Program (2014-2017)†	Incorporates child labor concerns into the strategy for work.(10)
PRSP (2010-2020)*	Includes overall goals of poverty reduction, increased access to health and social services, and improved infrastructure such as education.(53)
Country Program Action Plan (2013-2017)*	UNICEF- and government-implemented program that addresses the full development of young children and builds on the previous Country Program Action Plan. Aims to improve access to quality education, expand employment opportunities, and promote active participation of youth in society.(1, 6, 31) In 2014, continued a national awareness campaign about trafficking in persons and implemented mechanisms to reduce child trafficking in refugee camps.(21)

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

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Cameroon

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Although the Government formally adopted the National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children (PANETEC) in March 2014, it has yet to be implemented, since it has not been allocated a budget.(21) The Prime Minister established an ad hoc committee on child labor to develop a budget for PANETEC, although the members of this committee had not been designated as of December 2014.(30) Other existing policies and action plans related to child labor lack specific details, timetables, and responsible parties.(52, 54)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2014, the Government of Cameroon funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms. The Government has other programs that may have an impact on child labor, including its worst forms. (Table 8)

Table 8. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Global Action Program on Child Labor Issues (2011-2016)	\$15 million USDOL-funded 6-year 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. In Cameroon, aims to build the capacity of the national government, to develop strategic policies to address the elimination of child labor and forced labor, and to strengthen legal protections and social service delivery for child domestic workers.(55, 56)
National Referral System‡	IOM-funded project to protect domestic workers and victims of child trafficking in Cameroon by providing assistance and referring victims to social services.(30)
Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children‡	MINAS-funded program that gathers information on street children and offers health care, education, and psychosocial care in partnership with the ILO. In 2014, MINAS identified 240 street children and reunited 77 of them with their families. (30)
Centers for Children in Need*‡	MINAS- and MINPROFF -operated shelters for women and children in need. MINAS-run shelters are located in four regions of Cameroon and MINPROFF operates at least one shelter in every region that provides vocational and educational training for girls and women.(31, 57) Victims of child trafficking are placed in MINAS-run shelters and are given lodging, food, health care, psychological care, education, vocational training, and family tracing as appropriate.(21)
Country Program Action Plan (2013-2017)*‡	UNICEF- and MINAS-implemented program aiming to improve social protection by ensuring access to primary education, improving preventative health care, promoting birth registration; also providing shelters and safe drinking water in the northern regions affected by floods.(1, 44) Aims to improve conditions in refugee camps in the East Region by providing education, clean drinking water and sanitation facilities, vaccinations, and by building child-friendly spaces.(30)
School Feeding Programs*‡	Programs funded by USDA, WFP, and the Ministry of Education that provide meals to help improve the educational goals of girls in target geographic zones.(6, 29) Feeding programs funded by WFP and the Ministry of Education benefit an average of 55,366 girls annually in the Extreme North, North, and Adamaoua Regions. (29) The U.S. Embassy in Yaoundé and USDA fund Food for Education, which operates in the North Region and promotes the use of school gardens to improve food security. Since the program began in 2013, it has provided breakfast and lunch to 95,867 primary school students and financed the construction of 497 school buildings, 12 wells.(58)
Direct Cash Transfer*‡	Government program that provides limited direct cash transfers to street children on an ad hoc basis.(29)
Horizons Femmes Project on Domestic Workers*	Government-supported, NGO-run project focusing on educating domestic workers about their rights.(44, 59)

* The impact of this program on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Cameroon.

In 2013, MINLSS evaluated the programs that had been implemented to prevent and combat child labor since 2003, but the results of the study have yet to be released.(1, 6, 31) Although the Government of Cameroon has implemented programs to assist victims of child trafficking and children engaged in street work and in domestic work, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, and funding was reduced during the reporting period.(30) Additionally, research did not find evidence of programs to specifically address child labor in agriculture, mining, and quarrying.

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 Cameroon (Table 9).

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ratify the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.	2013 – 2014
	Criminalize the use of children for illicit activities.	2014
	Ensure that laws are extended to children working in noncontractual employment and hazardous activities are prohibited for all children under age 18.	2014
	Ensure there is not a gap between the age for compulsory education and the established minimum age for work.	2009 – 2014
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors responsible for enforcing laws related to child labor in order to provide adequate coverage of the workforce. Ensure sufficient training and resources for inspectors to carry out inspections.	2009 – 2014
	Make information publicly available about the total number of investigators, investigations, violations, prosecutions, convictions, and penalties assessed.	2009 – 2014
	Ensure magistrates and prosecutors are familiar with existing laws and prosecute violations of child trafficking under Law N° 2011/024 Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery.	2014
	Establish a referral mechanism between law enforcement agencies and social services.	2013 – 2014
Coordination	Ensure existing coordinating mechanisms receive adequate funding to carry out their mandates.	2014
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the PRSP and National Youth Policy.	2010 – 2014
	Fully fund the National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children, and ensure that it addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.	2010 – 2014
	Ensure all policies and action plans related to child labor include a detailed timeline for implementation and designate responsible parties.	2010 – 2014
Social Programs	Ensure all children have access to education by ensuring that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Education is free, by eliminating school-related expenses; ■ Schools are free of sexual abuse; and ■ All children have access to birth registration. 	2009 – 2014
	Make the decree banning Parent-Teacher Association fees publicly available.	2014
	Assess the impact that existing programs may have on child labor.	2014
	Develop social protection programs that assist children working in agriculture, mining, and quarrying, and expand existing programs to better address the extent of the child labor problem in Cameroon.	2009 – 2014

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Cameroon

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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