

In 2013, Cameroon made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government ratified the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, investigated and prosecuted cases of child trafficking, and implemented new programs to address child labor specifically, and to increase access to education and health care. However, children continue to engage in child labor in agriculture and in the worst forms of child labor in commercial sexual exploitation. The Government has yet to approve its National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children. Additionally, gaps remain in the legislative framework, leaving children unprotected against the worst forms of child labor. Furthermore, social programs are limited and do not address all sectors in which children work.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Cameroon are engaged in agriculture, including in the production of cocoa, bananas, palm oil, rubber, and tea, as well as in the worst forms of child labor in commercial sexual exploitation.(1-5) A 2010 pilot study by the ILO estimates that approximately 4,000 children between ages 11 and 17, mostly girls, were engaged in commercial sexual exploitation.(6) In the urban informal sector, children carry heavy luggage and sell goods on the streets, such as cigarettes and water.(7-9) 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, 2014.(10)

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.(11)

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 (1-4, 12)
	Production of bananas,* coffee,* palm oil*† rubber,* and tea* (1, 4, 13)
	Raising livestock* (1, 12, 14)
Industry	Work in artisanal gold mines and gravel quarries* (15-17)
Services	Domestic service (3, 4, 18)
	Carrying heavy luggage and selling goods on the street (3, 7-9)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of trafficking* (4, 6, 19-21)
	Forced labor in the production of cocoa* and tea,* in fishing,* in domestic service, in street vending, and in work in spare parts shops, as a result of trafficking (4, 9, 17, 20-24)
	Forced begging (9, 12, 13, 22)
	Transporting drugs (3, 9, 13, 25)

* 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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Street children who are used to transport drugs in cities such as Yaoundé and Douala are at risk of being recruited into gangs.(3, 9, 25) In the three Northern regions, it is a tradition to send boys 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.(9, 12, 13, 22) Cameroon is a source and destination country for the trafficking of children; Cameroon is also a transit country for children trafficked between Gabon and Nigeria, and for children trafficked to Europe.(4, 21, 23, 24) Child trafficking also occurs internally and is prevalent in the Northwest region.(26)

Access to education is hindered by the remote locations of schools and the lack of potable water in rural schools.(27, 28) In addition, the Government of Cameroon reports that in many regions, fewer than 40 percent of children are registered at birth. Unregistered children in Cameroon cannot access essential services, including schooling.(8, 12)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON 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	✓

In 2013, the Government ratified the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; however, it has not ratified the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography.(29, 30)

The Government has established relevant 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 (3, 9, 31)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Law No. 017; Sections 86 and 87 of the Labor Code (3, 31, 32)
List of Hazardous Occupations Prohibited for Children	Yes		Law No. 017 (32)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 4 of the Constitution; Law No. 2011/024; Articles 292 and 293 of the Penal Code; Labor Code (31, 33-36)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Law No. 2011/024; Law Project Relating to the Fight Against Trafficking in Persons and Slavery (1, 4, 34, 36, 37)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 343 of the Penal Code; Article 76 of Law No. 2010/12 (33, 34, 38)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Presidential Decree No. 1994/185 (40, 41)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	12	Articles 9 and 16 of Law No. 1998/004 (42-44)
Free Public Education	Yes		Presidential Decree No. 2001/041 (5, 12, 45)

* No conscription or no standing military.

While Law No. 017 sets a minimum age for hazardous work and prohibits children from certain occupations, it does not prohibit work underwater and at dangerous heights, which is often performed by children who fish or harvest bananas.(17, 32) The Law does not fully protect children working in agriculture, domestic service, and street vending, even though many children are known to work in these sectors. Labor laws do not extend to these children, who typically work without formal employment contracts; moreover, health and safety laws do not apply to all domestic workers.(17, 32) The Government lacks a mechanism for protecting these children, since they are not covered by law.(3, 9, 12, 17, 32) The compulsory school age of 12 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. Although Presidential Decree No. 2001/041 establishes the right to free education, in practice, additional school fees and the costs of books and uniforms are prohibitive for many families.(3, 12, 45) The Ministry of Education offers fee waivers to disadvantaged primary students; however, these waivers sometimes do not cover the costs or arrive late, which means that parents must still pay some out-of-pocket fees.(3, 46, 47) The Government has not criminalized the use of children for illicit activities.(13, 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 Social Security	Lead efforts to enforce child labor laws, in cooperation with other government bodies, including the Ministries of Social Affairs, Justice, Women's Empowerment and the Family, and Employment.(3)
National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms	Promote and protect human rights and investigate human rights abuses.(5, 42, 48)
Minors Brigade	Investigate the use of children in hazardous work and trafficking; work within the public security sections of local police stations; and work within public security sections of local police stations.(5, 36)
Ministry of Justice	Contribute to investigations through judicial auxiliaries and send files to court for prosecution as appropriate.(36)

Research found no evidence that labor law enforcement agencies in Cameroon took actions to combat child labor, including its worst form. However, criminal law enforcement agencies in Cameroon took such actions.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2013, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MINLSS) employed 81 labor inspectors, which is an insufficient number, according to an MINLSS official.(3) Additionally, inspectors often do not have the means of transportation or fuel they need to conduct inspections.(3) A 2011 ILO review of Cameroon's labor inspectorate found that few workplace visits occur.(49) Labor inspectors are informed of the ILO's core conventions during their initial training, but they do not receive any further training on these issues.(3) The ILO Committee of Experts has expressed concern that inspectors are not sufficiently familiar with the labor laws.(3, 49) The number of inspections conducted in 2013 is unavailable. There are no official comprehensive statistics on the number of child labor violations found, of penalties or citations issued, or of children removed and assisted as a result of the inspections.(3)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2013, the Government conducted at least 10 child trafficking investigations, and at least five children were removed from exploitative labor situations and eight children were rescued from traffickers as a result of these investigations; these children were placed in the care of social services. The investigations targeted trafficking within Cameroon, from the Central African Republic for labor exploitation, and to Equatorial Guinea for commercial sexual exploitation.(3, 50) At least one person was convicted of child trafficking.(3)

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

Research found no evidence that the Government has established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms. However, the Government has other mechanisms that may have an impact on child labor (Table 6).

Table 6. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Inter-Ministerial Committee	Coordinate government efforts to combat trafficking in persons, including by training stakeholders, proposing legislation, and ratifying international instruments.(3)
Joint Mobile Brigade	Work to prevent and combat the phenomenon of street children by identifying street children, helping to convince them to return to their families or to enter Government-run centers, and educating families whose children have returned home on the root causes of the phenomenon to prevent these children from returning to the streets.(1, 13)

In 2013, the Inter-Ministerial Committee, with assistance from the NGO Vital Voices, organized two training sessions on trafficking in persons for judges, diplomats, social workers, labor officials, and members of civil society.(3)

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
Trafficking in Persons Action Plan*	Outlines efforts to prosecute and convict 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.(51)
PRSP*	Includes overall goals of poverty reduction, increased access to health and social services, and improved infrastructure such as education.(52)
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.(13)

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

† Program was launched during the reporting period.

In 2013, the Government and UNICEF launched a new Country Program Action Plan to address the full development of young children and build on the previous Country Program Action Plan.(13) The Government appoints Child Parliamentarians to provide recommendations on issues related to children, including child labor.(5, 53)

In 2013, the Government drafted a National Plan of Action to Combat Child Labor and Trafficking in Children. However, it has yet to ratify or officially approve the Plan, and it is unknown whether the Plan addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.(1, 5, 35, 54, 55) The PRSP has neither budgets nor details related to the worst forms of child labor.(52) Moreover, the Trafficking in Persons Action Plan does not include timelines.(51, 56)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

In 2013, the Government of Cameroon funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing 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	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. 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.(57, 58)

Table 8. Social Programs to Address Child Labor (cont)

Program	Description
Multi-Sector Cooperation Program*†	UNICEF-implemented program to address areas such as ensuring access to basic education and preventive health care, returning children to school, developing special curriculum for schools with high concentrations of Bakas, promoting birth registration, and providing shelters and safe drinking water in northern regions affected by floods.(3, 36)
School Feeding Program*‡	USAID-funded program provides meals to help improve the educational goals of girls in target geographic zones.(5, 46)
Direct Cash Transfer*‡	Government program that provides limited direct cash transfers to street children on an ad hoc basis.(46)
Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children‡	Government program that gathers information on street children and offers health care, education, and psychosocial care.(3)
Horizen Femmes project on domestic workers*	Government-supported, NGO-run project focusing on educating domestic workers about their rights.(35, 36)

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

† Program was launched during the reporting period.

‡ 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, and updated its manual for identifying child trafficking victims. The results of the study are expected to be released in 2014.(3, 13) As part of the Project to Fight the Phenomenon of Street Children, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and the Civic Service Agency for Participation in Development adopted a collaborative framework for the reintegration of street children. By mid-2013, the MINAS had identified 1,321 street children and had reunited 554 of them with their families.(3)

The school feeding program has reached only 5.3 percent of students in target zones.(46) Despite the initiatives described here, Cameroon's social programs do not address all the sectors in which children work, such as agriculture and domestic service.(56)

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
Laws	Ratify the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.	2013
	Ensure that the law fully protects children working in agriculture, domestic service, and street vending, and that it develops mechanisms for enforcing those laws.	2009 – 2013
	Prohibit children under age 18 from engaging in dangerous activities—such as working underwater and at dangerous heights—and enact legislation to prohibit the use, procurement, or offering of children for illicit activities.	2009 – 2013
	Raise the age for compulsory education to 14 to match the established minimum age for work.	2009 – 2013
Enforcement	Ensure that the number of labor inspectors is sufficient, given the scope and prevalence of child labor in Cameroon, and allocate more resources to provide vehicles and fuel to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security.	2009 – 2013
	Provide regular training to inspectors on child labor issues and Cameroonian labor laws.	2013
	Gather and make information publicly available about child labor investigations and enforcement.	2009 – 2013
	Establish a referral mechanism between enforcement agencies and social services.	2013
Coordination	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat child labor, including all its worst forms.	2013

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Government Policies	Formally adopt 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 – 2013
	Assess the potential impact of existing policies on addressing child labor.	2010 – 2013
	Include in the PRSP both the budgets and more detail related to government efforts on the worst forms of child labor.	2011 – 2013
	Include a detailed timeline in the strategy to implement the Trafficking in Persons Action Plan	2010 – 2013
Social Programs	Expand the School Feeding Program to reach more students in target zones.	2013
	Develop social protection programs that assist children working in the worst forms of child labor in such sectors as agriculture and domestic service, and expand existing programs.	2009 – 2013
	Ensure the registration of all children at birth to guarantee they are able to access social services, including education.	2011 – 2013
	Ensure that additional school fees and the costs of books and uniforms do not hinder children from accessing education.	2011 – 2013

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