

Benin

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT REGRESSION IN PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Benin made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved a bill to establish legal, institutional, and regulatory frameworks to transform the school feeding program into a national program that will provide meals to 1.4 million schoolchildren in over 5,700 schools. It also adopted a Holistic Social Protection Policy with a \$1 billion operationalization strategy that includes free healthcare for vulnerable children, education, and support for students with disabilities. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Benin is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because labor inspectors are not permitted to conduct inspections in the agricultural sector, an area in which children are known to perform hazardous work, due to the lack of an implementation decree. Labor inspections are a key tool for identifying labor violations, and their absence makes children more vulnerable to child labor. The government also does not meet international standards on education, as it does not provide universal free basic education for a minimum of 9 years. In addition, inadequate funding for the labor inspectorate and a lack of coordination between civil and criminal enforcement agencies may impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. Despite identifying nearly ten thousand victims of child labor, the government did not report any investigations or convictions of perpetrators of worst forms of child labor laws. Finally, due to the lack of a unified digitized data collection system, cases are recorded on paper, creating significant challenges in compiling and sharing law enforcement information.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	25.7% (Unavailable)
Boys		27.9%
Girls		23.3%
Urban		17.3%
Rural		31.3%
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	4.5% (Unavailable)
Boys		5.3%
Girls		3.7%
Urban		3.1%
Rural		5.5%
Attending School	5 to 14	70.1%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	18.5%

Children in Benin are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in the production of cotton and commercial sexual exploitation. Children also perform hazardous tasks in mining and in the production of crushed granite.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Production of cotton†, including exposure to pesticides†. Cattle herding†, forestry†, and fishing†.
Industry	Quarrying†, including for granite; and collecting†, crushing†, and sieving†, lifting heavy objects†, and exposure to fine dust and toxic substances. Working at elevated heights without protection, the risk of falling into unsecured pits, and occasionally using heavy construction equipment†. Washing† and sieving† in mining. Construction†, including welding†, carrying heavy materials†, breaking rocks†, and working at elevated heights without protection. Transportation† and manufacturing†.
Services	Domestic work.† Street work, including vending† and begging. Working in restaurants† and bars†.

Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity	
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor†	Forced labor in agriculture, including the production of cotton, cattle herding, forestry, and fishing. Forced labor in construction, mining, in the quarrying of granite, transportation, and manufacture. Forced labor in domestic work, handicraft activities, and street work including vending and begging. Underage work in restaurants and bars. Use in illicit activities including drug trafficking, selling smuggled gasoline on roadsides, and illegally selling alcohol, cigarettes, and pharmaceutical products on the street. Commercial sexual exploitation of children, sometimes as a result of international trafficking.

† 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.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Benin's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Establish by law 9 years of free, compulsory education, including lower secondary education.
	Increase the compulsory education age from 11 years to 14 years to align with the minimum age for work.
Enforcement	Increase funding for the labor inspectorate to conduct comprehensive nationwide investigations; provide departments with sufficient transportation, fuel, and other material necessities to carry out labor inspections, including in sectors with a high prevalence of child labor, such as mining, quarrying, fishing, and domestic work; develop and train stakeholders in standard operating procedures for the identification and management of child labor inspections; increase the number of labor inspectors from 64 to 138 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 5.5 million people.
	Investigate, convict, and adequately penalize perpetrators of worst forms of child labor crimes to the fullest extent of the law.
	Issue an implementation decree to allow the labor inspectorate to conduct inspections in the agriculture sector, and ensure that labor inspections are not impeded by requirement to conduct them by committee of labor inspectors, policy officers, and social workers.
	Establish a unified electronic data collection system to compile and share law enforcement information on all worst forms of child labor between the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of the Interior and Public Security's Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking.
	Publish data on criminal law enforcement efforts, including the number of investigations, perpetrators convicted, and penalties imposed for worst forms of child labor crimes.
	Extend the Central Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking's child protection services to police stations in all 12 departments in Benin and provide legal assistance to victims of trafficking, including providing legal alternatives to protect survivors who would face retribution or hardship in their country of origin.
Coordination	Ensure effective coordination among agencies, including by clarifying institutional mandates and improving communication regarding the collection and sharing of data.
Government Policies	Dedicate adequate resources to support the implementation of all policies related to child labor, including the National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons.
	Ensure that policies that address child labor are implemented and that their results are publicly documented.
Social Programs	Increase the number of teachers and the number of schools. Ensure the safety and well-being of children at school, especially girls, and provide adequate sanitation facilities and menstrual accommodations. Provide accessible infrastructure and increase transportation options; alleviate financial burdens associated with schooling. Remove barriers to education by providing birth registration to all children.

Area	Suggested Action
	Ensure the safety and well-being of children at school, and provide pregnant girls and adolescent mothers access to education and social reintegration.
	Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, domestic work, and commercial sexual exploitation.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Girls are especially at risk for the worst forms of child labor because they are particularly targeted for exploitation and are not able to fully benefit from the protection of the law due to traditional practices. Girls are the victims of most sex and labor trafficking within Benin; girls are also trafficked to Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, the Republic of the Congo, and, to a lesser extent, other countries in West and Central Africa. Criminal groups recruit Beninese girls for domestic work in Lebanon, Algeria, and the Persian Gulf. Under a traditional practice called *vidomègon*, children—the majority of which are girls—from northern rural areas are trafficked to the urban southern corridor where community members and relatives use the promise of education or employment to exploit them in domestic servitude, markets, farming, the production of handicrafts, and commercial sexual exploitation. Children from villages along Benin's border with Niger and Nigeria, rural children, children from low-income families, and children without birth registration documents are also at higher risk for child labor.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Evidence suggests that incidences of abuse in school, including corporal punishment, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation by teachers in exchange for attending class, taking exams, and receiving passing grades continue to hamper educational access, especially for girls. Early and forced marriage, unplanned pregnancy, inadequate toilets and sanitation facilities, as well as cultural taboos and lack of access to menstruation education and products further impede girls' education. Other barriers include traveling long distances to attend class, not enough school buildings, and an insufficient number of teachers. The government runs 20 specialty schools for students with disabilities, but access is limited in rural areas. Children from rural and poor families also often lack identity documents due to the cost as well as to parents' limited understanding of birth registration procedures. Children without documentation may be denied education, leaving them more vulnerable to child labor.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Benin has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Benin's laws do not meet international standards on free public education as basic education through the lower secondary level is not guaranteed by law.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	14	✓	Articles 166 and 301 of the Labor Code; Article 210 of the Child Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Articles 210 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 1 of the Hazardous Occupations List
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Hazardous Occupations List
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Articles 3 and 303 of the Labor Code; Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Articles 2–4, 6, 16, and 21–25 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 201, 212, 352, and 353 of the Child Code; Articles 499–501 and 504 of the Penal Code

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✓	Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors; Articles 212 and 378 of the Child Code; Article 504 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Articles 212 and 353 of the Child Code; Article 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 6 of Law 2005-43
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	Article 6 of Law 2005-43; Title II, Article 32 of the Constitution
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Articles 2 and 4 of the Law Relating to the Transportation and Trafficking of Minors
Compulsory Education Age	11‡	✗	Article 24 of Act N° 2003-17; Article 113 of the Child Code
Free Public Education		✗	Article 13 of the Constitution; Article 114 of the Child Code; Article 24 of Act N°2003-17

‡ Age calculated based on available information

Children in Benin are required to attend primary school, which lasts 6 years and typically ends at age 11. This standard makes children ages 11 through 14 vulnerable to child labor as they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work. In addition, while the law provides free primary education to all children, basic education through the lower secondary level is not guaranteed by law, which may increase the risk of children’s vulnerability to child labor.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Benin took actions to address child labor. However, labor inspectors are not permitted to conduct inspections in the agricultural sector, an area in which children are known to perform hazardous work, due to the lack of an implementation decree. In addition, the lack of adequate training in detecting and enforcing existing child labor laws, limited resources, and security concerns impeded enforcement of civil and criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
Ministry of Labor and Civil Service (Ministère du Travail et du Fonction Publique [MTFP]): Enforces child labor laws and investigates labor code infractions. Oversees the National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (<i>Comité Directeur National de Lutte Contre le Travail des Enfants</i>). In 2024, MTFP established a 3-year tripartite cooperation between Benin, Luxembourg, and UNICEF to address child labor in high-prevalence districts. With a budget of more than \$157 million, “the Luxembourg Project” includes awareness programs, schooling assistance programs, and strategies aimed at ensuring access to school, even in the most remote areas. The Ministry also began drafting a Strategic Plan for 2024–2028. However, incomplete data on child labor violations, prosecution statistics, and enforcement outcomes impede efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor.
Ministry of the Interior and Public Security (Ministère de l’Intérieur et de la Sécurité Publique): Enforces criminal laws related to the protection of minors, including the worst forms of child labor, through the Central Office for the Protection of Minors, Families, and the Prevention of Human Trafficking (OCPM). In rural areas, the police have this responsibility. OCPM’s child protection services exist in police stations in 3 of the 12 departments in Benin (Alibori, Borgou, and Zou) and OCPM maintains a child trafficking database—Benin’s Children (<i>Enfants du Benin</i>)—to track and process child trafficking cases. Coordinates with MTFP to inspect labor code infractions related to child labor and with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance to provide assistance to survivors. The OCPM Vice Squad (<i>Brigade des Moeurs</i>) undertakes child sex trafficking investigations.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts	
Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes
Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Unknown
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	No

In 2024, 64 labor inspectors conducted 1,968 of worksite inspections, finding 9,842 child labor violations, removing 1,394 children from labor situations, and referring 630 children to care services. Although the Labor Code permits labor inspectors to inspect all workplaces, the government has reported that labor inspectors are not permitted to conduct inspections in the agricultural sector, an area in which children are known to perform hazardous work, due to the lack of an implementation decree. The government also conducted an unknown number of investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes, initiated 51 prosecutions, and convicted 21 perpetrators. The sentences for these convictions were commuted entirely, thereby allowing perpetrators to operate with impunity.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Benin established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, the lack of standard operating procedures among stakeholders hindered efforts to effectively address all forms of child labor.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
National Executive Committee to Combat Child Labor (CDN): Coordinates efforts to address child labor. Falls under the jurisdiction of MTFP and includes delegates from UNICEF, trade unions, local NGOs, and other government ministries. New members took their seats for 3-year terms in September 2024 and met for 3 days. CDN also coordinated a nationwide public awareness campaign, mobilizing over 6,000 child protection stakeholders in high-prevalence areas.

Benin established policies related to child labor. However, the government reported no efforts made in the advancement of these policies during the reporting period.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor (2019–2023): Aimed to reduce the worst forms of child labor in Benin by 70 percent by the end of 2023. The National Policy to Combat Child Labor is implemented through this action plan, and addresses legislative and institutional frameworks, develops awareness campaigns, offers education and training, provides survivor care, establishes prevention strategies, and develops institutional mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the plan. Included a vocational education program focused on formalizing and regulating apprenticeships for children. Updates to the National Action Plan began in 2024, with a new plan for 2025–2030 in the drafting stage at the close of the reporting period.
Cooperative Agreement to Combat Cross-Border Trafficking: Tripartite cooperative agreement between the Governments of Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo committing to cooperate and assist each other in the investigation of human trafficking offenses, including child trafficking. Details on activities, if any, undertaken under this agreement during 2024 were not made available.
National Action Plan to Fight Trafficking in Persons (2020–2024): Aimed to eradicate trafficking in persons, including child trafficking, by strengthening governmental systems and institutional frameworks. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Technical Commission coordinated data collection on trafficking across various government ministries and agencies and is responsible for the creation of a Trafficking in Persons National Information System. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken in 2024 to implement this policy.

† The government had other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor.

Benin funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, existing social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Zero Tolerance for Child Marriage: Joint campaign by the Government of Benin and UNICEF to create a protective environment for children in their communities. Child, early, and forced marriage—including barter marriage and marriage by abduction—continue to be widespread in Benin, particularly in rural areas such as Alibori, where 54 percent of brides were given in marriage before the age of 18. An average of 6 percent of girls in Benin are married before age 15. The program continued to be active during the reporting period.
Government-Funded Shelters and Retraining Centers: † Provide social services to survivors of child labor and child trafficking. Among these, OCPM operates an interim care facility for children rescued from child trafficking or labor exploitation, which has capacity for 160 children and provides housing, medical, legal, and psychological services. In addition, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance operates 85 Social Promotion Centers (<i>Centre de Promotion Sociale</i>), which provide social services to child trafficking survivors in all of Benin’s 77 municipalities. An MTFP-run vocational school program, with the assistance of UNICEF, provides training in trades to survivors of child trafficking. In 2024, 35 new licensed child protection centers were established, including 14 daycare centers and 21 Child Reception and Protection Centers.
National Integrated School Feeding Program (2022–2026): ‡ \$31.7 million program funded by the Government of Benin and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. Implemented by the World Food Program and Catholic Relief Services. Covers 75 percent of schools in Benin, representing 1.4 million schoolchildren, and aims to improve school retention and reduce hunger. From January through September 2024, there were 18,873 metric tons of food distributed in over 5,700 schools, and the program continued into 2024–2025. The government also approved a bill in 2024 to establish legal, institutional, and regulatory frameworks to make the National Integrated School Feeding Program a sustainable government program, taking over the project from the World Food Program.

‡ Program is funded by the Government of Benin.
† The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports