

Mali

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, Mali made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The transition government enacted a new penal code that provides more comprehensive protections against slavery and slavery-like practices, criminally penalizes the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, and mandates that children formerly associated with armed groups be treated as victims rather than perpetrators. The Child Labor Unit at the Ministry of Labor, Civil Service, and Social Dialogue also led a child labor awareness campaign and capacity-building mission in Kangaba and conducted two oversight visits to small-scale gold mining sites. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Mali is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because the transition government continued to use children in support roles in its armed forces in violation of national and international law. The government also lacks a policy to address all worst forms of child labor that exist in the country, and social and rehabilitation services to assist survivors of child labor remain inadequate.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education			Working Children by Sector, Ages 5-14	
Children	Age	Percent and Population	Sector/Industry	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	30.4% (1,891,233)	Agriculture	96.9%
Attending School	5 to 14	50.1%	Industry	0.6%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	19.1%	Services	2.5%

Children in Mali are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in hereditary slavery, forced begging, and armed conflict. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, particularly in the production of cotton and rice.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Cultivating,† harvesting,† ginning,† processing, transporting,† and applying chemical fertilizers and pesticides† to crops, particularly in the production of cotton and rice. Cutting† and collecting trees and hay. Also raising livestock† and fishing† activities, including throwing nets and piloting small boats.
Industry	Working in artisanal gold mining,† including working with mercury.† Also working in quarrying,† construction,† and assembling of fishing canoes.†
Services	Domestic work† and street work,† including market vending,† begging,† and performing tasks in the transportation sector. Use of children in support roles by state armed forces.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced labor in artisanal mining, domestic work, street work, and farming, including in the production of rice. Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Hereditary slavery. Forced begging by Koranic teachers. Use in illicit activities, including in the trafficking of drugs, and recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict.

† 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.

In 2024, Malian defense and security forces, including the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA), gendarmerie, and police, used children in support roles in armed conflict.

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

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

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law's light work provisions limit the number of weekly hours for light work in accordance with international standards.
	Guarantee free basic education to all children in Mali, including non-citizens.
Enforcement	Establish a digital tracking system for civil worst forms of child labor violations. Collect and publish child labor enforcement data, including the number of child labor violations found, the number of penalties imposed, and the number of penalties imposed that were collected during the year.
	Provide adequate funding and material resources to child labor enforcement agencies, and increase the number of labor inspectors from 75 to 168 to ensure adequate coverage of the labor force of approximately 6.7 million workers.
	Increase financial, human, and material resources to the Brigade for the Protection of Morals and Children and other criminal enforcement agencies to strengthen their capacity to identify victims and prosecute perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor.
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement, including the number of investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated, convictions obtained, and penalties imposed for violations of the worst forms of child labor.
	Ensure that government officials are held accountable for interference in legal cases related to crimes concerning the worst forms of child labor, including in cases of slavery.
	Prosecute and convict perpetrators of the worst forms of child labor, including teachers at Koranic schools who force students to beg or work for them and individuals who recruit or use children in armed conflict, in accordance with the law.
	Ensure that any children formerly associated with armed groups are not detained, but rather transferred to social services or to UN child protection agencies for appropriate reintegration and social protection services in accordance with the Interministerial Circular and the UN-signed Protocol.
	Ensure that children under age 18 are not recruited into or used in the national armed forces, in compliance with national law, and that any individuals who use children in support roles are held accountable.
Coordination	Publish the results of meetings and activities of the National Committee to Track Child Labor on an annual basis.
Government Policies	Formally adopt and implement a national policy that addresses all forms of child labor that are prevalent in Mali.
Social Programs	Continue implementing key social programs to address child labor, making information about implementation measures publicly available on an annual basis, and institute new programs to address child labor in all relevant sectors, including domestic work, forced begging, and commercial sexual exploitation.
	Expand the Child Travel Card Program, which currently provides identification only to Malian children while traveling both within and outside of the country, to cover children with foreign citizenship.
	Renew and sustain efforts to demobilize children from non-state armed groups, rehabilitate them with the appropriate psychosocial, medical, and educational support, and reintegrate them into their communities.
	Expand shelter capacity and social services to provide the necessary care for survivors of the worst forms of child labor, including for children subjected to forced begging and children used in armed conflict.
	Make education accessible for all children, including girls, displaced children, and those living in conflict-affected areas, by removing school-related fees, expanding school infrastructure, increasing the number of teachers, taking measures to ensure the safety of children in schools, and increasing birth registration rates.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children of enslaved and formerly enslaved people face significant risk of being enslaved themselves or exploited in practices of hereditary servitude. These practices are longstanding in certain communities in Mali, including in Kayes, Koulikoro, Menaka, and Timbuktu. During the reporting period, a civil society organization documented 1,316 internally displaced children near the border with Mauritania who were enslaved. Enslaved children perform agricultural or domestic labor and are often sexually abused. Children, particularly Songhai children, also work in debt bondage in the northern salt mines of Taoudenni. Furthermore, over 45,000 children in the north, south, and west are involved in artisanal gold mining, where they are exposed to toxic substances and extreme temperatures, transport heavy loads of water and minerals, and work long hours. Around mining sites, children also are victims of commercial sexual exploitation and are involved in trafficking narcotics. Many of the children working in mines are from neighboring countries in the region. Finally, some boys, including those from neighboring countries, are placed in the care of Koranic teachers to receive an education and are then forced by their teachers to beg on the street or work in fields, after which they must surrender their earnings.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

The Constitution guarantees free and compulsory education for citizens; however, many children, especially girls, do not attend school because parents are expected to contribute to school operating costs, as well as to teachers' additional salary payments, which are cost-prohibitive for many impoverished families. Long distances between villages and schools, and lack of schools, classes, and teachers, are also significant barriers to education. At the end of 2024, over 2,000 schools remained closed due to terrorist attacks, intercommunal violence, insecurity, and flooding, and children displaced by such crises faced interruptions in their education and barriers to enrolling in school after fleeing their homes. In addition, many children in Mali are not registered at birth, which may prevent them from accessing services such as education. Research indicates that there are hundreds of thousands of children in Mali without birth certificates, and that while lack of documentation does not exclude children from schooling, these students may not be allowed to take national exams. Evidence also suggests that incidences of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse prevent some children from remaining in school.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Mali has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, Mali's laws do not meet international standards on free basic education because the law excludes non-citizens.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	15	✓	Articles 187 and 326 of the Labor Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Hazardous Occupations List; Article 1 of the 2017-4388 Amendment to Hazardous Occupations List; Articles 189 and 326 of the Labor Code; and Article D.189-14 of the Implementing Decree of the Labor Code.
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Hazardous Occupations List; Article 1 of the 2017-4388 Amendment to Hazardous Occupations List; Article 189 of the Labor Code
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Article 4 of the Constitution; Articles 6 and 314 of the Labor Code; Articles 1, 7, and 8 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Articles 324-11–324-18 of the Penal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Articles 324-29, 324-41, and 324-52 of the Penal Code; Articles 1, 7, and 8 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 63 of the Child Protection Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		✓	Articles 324-29, 324-41, 325-6–325-8, and 327-7 of the Penal Code; Articles 1 and 7 of the Trafficking in Persons Law; Article 57 of the Child Protection Code

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Articles 3, 94-96, 99, and 106 of the Law on Narcotics; Articles 18 and 50 of the Child Protection Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 17 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 242-83 and 242-85 of the Penal Code; Article 3 of the Military General Statute
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓*	Article 24 of the Constitution; Article 17 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 242-83, 242-85, 313-1, and 314-1 of the Penal Code; Article 3 of the Military General Statute
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Article 17 of the Child Protection Code; Articles 242-83, 242-85, 251-8, 313-1, and 314-1 of the Penal Code
Compulsory Education Age	15‡	✓	Articles 26 and 34 of the Law of Education
Free Public Education		✗	Article 11 of the Constitution; Articles 4, 7, and 26 of the Law of Education

* Country has no conscription

‡ Age calculated based on available information

The Government of Mali enacted a new penal code on December 13, 2024. Among other changes, the new statute provides more comprehensive protections against slavery and slavery-like practices than the prior penal code, including providing penalties for offenses such as preventing children from receiving education due to their or their parents' enslavement status. The 2024 penal code also strengthens protections for children by criminally penalizing the recruitment and use in armed conflict of any child under the age of 18 and provides protections from prosecution for children who are victims of recruitment and/or use by groups involved in acts of terrorism.

In July 2024, the government issued an order detailing the activities, hours, and conditions in which children ages 13 and 14 are permitted to engage in light work. However, Malian law allows children age 12 to perform light work in domestic work and light seasonal work, which is below the international standard of age 13, and children under age 15 may be permitted to work more than 14 hours per week. In addition, the Constitution and the Education Law formally guarantee the right of free education only for citizens, potentially making it difficult for non-citizen children to enroll in school.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Mali took actions to address child labor. However, insufficient human, financial, and material resource allocation hindered enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
<p>Ministry of Labor, Civil Service, and Social Dialogue (MOL): Investigates Labor Code infractions, including those regarding child labor. Within MOL, the National Unit to Combat Child Labor (CNLTE) is responsible for collecting and maintaining data on child labor, monitoring children's working conditions, building stakeholder capacity to address child labor, and publishing an annual report on child labor. One labor inspector in each of the 20 regions is designated as the CNLTE focal point to facilitate regional coordination. While the CNLTE conducted two monitoring visits to gold mining sites and an awareness campaign and capacity-building mission in Kangaba during the reporting period, insufficient human, financial, and material resources limited officials' ability to cover the entire country.</p>
<p>Brigade for the Protection of Morals and Children: Functions within the National Police and enforces criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. Conducts unannounced visits to workplaces in the informal sector to identify potential labor and sexual exploitation of children. Investigates crimes, in cooperation with the Judiciary Police when needed, and refers cases to the appropriate courts in the Ministry of Justice for prosecution.</p>

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	Unknown

In 2024, **75** labor inspectors conducted an **unknown** number of worksite inspections, finding an **unknown** number of child labor violations. It is also **unknown** whether investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor were conducted, prosecutions were initiated, or perpetrators were convicted.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Mali established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor
National Committee to Track Child Labor (CDN): Chaired by the National Director of Labor and acts as the main coordinating body for the elimination of child labor in Mali. Includes the Ministries of Mines, Education, and Agriculture, as well as civil society organizations, professional organizations, business organizations, and trade unions. During the reporting period, the CDN held three statutory meetings and reviewed projects and programs to ensure their alignment with child labor policies.

Mali established policies related to child labor. However, the lack of official approval of the updated National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor in Mali hindered the government's ability to effectively address the worst forms of child labor during the reporting period.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor
Anti-Trafficking in Persons National Action Plan: * Led by the Ministry of Justice and coordinated by the National Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons and Similar Practices (French acronym CNCTPPA), contains provisions for prevention, protection of victims, prosecution of perpetrators, and coordination. During the reporting period, the government conducted awareness-raising campaigns in local media and in the most commonly spoken languages.
National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor in Mali (PANETEM) (2023–2027): Five-year plan developed in partnership with UNICEF, based on an evaluation of the previous plan and regional consultations in Bamako, Sikasso, Kayes, and Mopti. The plan is awaiting official approval by the Secretary General of the government. In the meantime, UNICEF, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children, and the Family (MPFEF), and other partners continue to work on related initiatives. For example, in September 2024, a week-long train-the-trainers workshop was held for child protection stakeholders on CPIMS+, a digital case management tool that facilitates child identification, family tracing, and service provision and monitoring. This tool will help stakeholders reintegrate children removed from child labor with their families when appropriate and help ensure that appropriate victim services are provided.
Interministerial Circular and the Protocol on the Release and Transfer of Children Associated with Armed Groups and Armed Forces: Provide a framework that highlights the responsibility of the government to prevent children's involvement in armed conflict and to protect and reintegrate those children who become involved. Children removed from armed groups are referred to MPFEF for services. During the reporting period, the Malian Armed Forces conducted regular age screening for new recruits in accordance with the circular.

* Policy was approved during the reporting period.

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

Mali funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address the problem in all sectors in which child labor has been identified, including in domestic work, forced begging, and commercial sexual exploitation.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor
Work: No Child’s Business: Four-year multistakeholder program addressing the root causes of child labor, concluded in September 2024. Partners included MOL, UNICEF, Save the Children, <i>Environnement et Développement (ENDA)</i> Mali, the Government of the Netherlands, and Education International. Activities included creation of anti-child-labor clubs, training of teachers in the rights of children, support for women and women’s groups with income-generating activities and vocational training, and creation of spaces for social dialogue in villages. As a result of this program, 7,171 children ages 5 to 18 left gold mining and cotton farming to return to school, and 12 local commitment agreements were signed to combat child labor in gold mining.
Child Travel Card Program: † Program overseen by the MPFEF Directorate for the Promotion of Children and Family. The Child Travel Card Program (<i>Titre de Voyage pour Enfant</i>) is carried out as part of the Directorate’s efforts to address child trafficking by facilitating proper identification of children traveling within and outside Mali. Failure to show a child travel card prompts follow-up actions to confirm whether the child is a victim of human trafficking. Research indicates that this program does not cover foreign citizen children.
Program to Support Children in Armed Conflict: ‡ Program overseen by the MPFEF’s Interministerial Committee to Prevent Grave Violations Against Children that carries out awareness-raising campaigns to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, implements reintegration programs for former child soldiers, and conducts joint missions with international partners to determine the presence of children in armed conflict. During the reporting period, 12 children formerly associated with armed groups received rehabilitation services. However, the disintegration of the peace process during the reporting year limited the ability of stakeholders to demobilize, disarm, and reintegrate children from non-state armed groups.

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

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports