

In 2020, Maldives made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In February 2020, the government enacted a new Child Rights Protection Act that criminalizes child labor below the age of 16 and child exploitation, including the use of children to sell drugs. The government also enacted a new Education Act in November 2020 that provides for free public education. During the reporting period, the government reported 335 incidents of commercial sexual exploitation involving children, of which 120 cases resulted in prosecution, and 65 incidents of children being used in illicit activities, including drug trafficking, of which 20 cases were prosecuted. The government also increased the labor inspectorate budget from \$572,984 to \$929,457. However, although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. The government has not identified specific hazardous occupations or activities that are prohibited for children, and the law does not sufficiently prohibit the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Moreover, the government does not have a policy or program to address all relevant worst forms of child labor in the country.



### I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Although research is limited, there is evidence that children in Maldives are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced labor in domestic work and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1-5) Information on children's work is limited because a national survey on child labor has not been conducted. Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Maldives.

**Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education**

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	3.9 (2,364)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	79.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.0
Primary Completion Rate (%)		91.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2009. (7)

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
Services	Domestic work (2,8)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2-5,8)
	Forced labor in domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2)
	Use in illicit activities, including the trafficking of drugs (2,3,8)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Maldivian children from the outer islands are brought to the capital, Malé, for domestic work. Once there, some of these children from impoverished families may be more vulnerable to sex trafficking. (2,9) Some are reported to be victims of forced labor and sexual abuse. (2) In addition, some girls from Bangladesh are believed to be victims of human trafficking to Maldives for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. (10) There are also some reports of foreign tourists engaging in commercial sexual exploitation of children. (2,11)




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### II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Maldives has ratified all 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 (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Maldives' legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including determining the types of hazardous work prohibited for children.

**Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor**

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Section 6 of the Employment Act; Article 26 of the Child Rights Protection Act (12,13)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 7 of the Employment Act (12)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Section 3 of the Employment Act; Sections 12–16 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (12,14)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 12–15 of the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act (14)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	No		Sections 17–19 of the Special Provisions Act to Deal with Child Sex Abuse Offenders (15)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Section 133(c)(1) of the Drugs Act; Article 122 of the Child Rights Protection Act (13,16)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children (17)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children; Article 14 of the Education Act (17-19)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 36(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Maldives; Article 5(b) of the Law on the Protection of the Rights of Children; Articles 17–20 of the Education Act (17-21)

\* No conscription (22)

In February 2020, the Child Rights Protection Act came into effect. (3,8,23,24,25) The new Act takes steps to ensure compliance with international child protection laws and standards, and criminalizes child labor below the

age of 16 and child exploitation, including the use of children to sell drugs. The Act also established a Children’s Ombudsperson who has oversight functions to ensure that the rights of children are not violated. (3,26) During the reporting period, the government also enacted a new Education Act that provides for free public education. (3,19,21,27)

The law does not sufficiently prohibit commercial sexual exploitation, because the use, procurement, and offering of a child for pornographic performances are not criminally prohibited. The government also has not determined the types of hazardous work prohibited for children. (3)

### III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

**Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement**

Organization/Agency	Role
Labor Relations Authority, Ministry of Economic Development	Enforces the Employment Act, including child labor provisions. Conducts labor inspections and issues fines for violations. (12,28)
Family and Child Protection Wing, Maldives Police Service (MPS)	Investigates complaints of child labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Refers cases to the Prosecutor General’s Office for prosecution and to the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services to provide victim services. (20) Employs eight officers in Malé to investigate child labor cases, including child commercial sexual exploitation and child pornography cases. (20) In 2020, expanded and renamed from Family and Child Protection Departments to Family and Child Protection Wing. (3)
Family and Child Protection Services, Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services	Receives referrals of children who have been exploited, including in commercial sexual exploitation and drug trafficking, and provides care for such victims. (8,28)
Anti-Human Trafficking Department, MPS	Investigates human trafficking-related offenses and enforces laws prohibiting trafficking in persons, including cases of child trafficking. (8) Employs five officers to investigate human trafficking cases. (20,29) During the reporting period, the former Anti-Human Trafficking Unit was upgraded to a separate Department and is working on increasing its capacity to handle trafficking cases with more personnel and specialized units, although these are not yet in place. (5)
Children’s Ombudsperson*	Established in 2020 pursuant to the Child Rights Protection Act. Has oversight functions to ensure that the rights of children are not violated. (3) Tasked with determining the extent to which state institutions adhere to the Child Rights Protection Act as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, enforcing the implementation of the Act and the Convention, and monitoring and evaluating institutions and personnel involved in protecting children’s rights. (26)

\* Agency responsible for child labor enforcement was created during the reporting period.

### Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Labor Relations Authority that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including labor inspector training for new inspectors.

**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$572,984 (8)	\$929,457 (21)
Number of Labor Inspectors	15 (8)	17 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (12)	Yes (12)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	No (8)	No (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (8)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (8)	No (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	230 (8)	62 (3)
Number Conducted at Worksites	230 (8)	62 (3)

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**Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)**

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (8)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (8)	N/A (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (8)	N/A (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (12)	Yes (12)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	No (8)	No (3)

In 2020, the labor inspectorate increased its budget from \$572,984 to \$929,457. (21) However, the Labor Relations Authority (LRA) reported that the amount of funding was not adequate to cover inspections in the outlying islands, which incurs a large travel cost. (3,8) The LRA also reported that new employees did not receive initial training from the government, because labor inspector training is not available locally. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the LRA was unable to send officers to receive any training overseas during the reporting period. (3,8) Although the LRA does not have a specific referral mechanism, the Maldives Police Service (MPS) has an established referral mechanism with the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services to ensure the protection of child victims in cases of child rights violations. (3)

In addition, although the labor inspectorate is authorized to assess penalties, no fines were issued in practice due to a lack of coordination between the LRA and the Maldives Inland Revenue Authority, which has the mandate to receive the payment of the fines. (8,12)

### **Criminal Law Enforcement**

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Maldives took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Family and Child Protection Department of the MPS that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including a lack of resources for investigators.

**Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor**

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (8)	Yes (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (8)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (8)	No (3)
Number of Investigations	80 (8)	400 (21)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (8)	351 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (8)	140 (21)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (8)	0 (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (8)	No (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (3)

Investigators have insufficient funding and resources, such as office facilities and transportation. (30) Police and other officials also have inadequate training on procedures for identifying human trafficking victims and providing referrals to protective services, including for children. (2) MPS reported that although several trainings for investigators touched on the issue of child labor, including on commercial sexual exploitation of children and trafficking in persons, these trainings were not sufficient, because they were not designed to specifically address child labor. (3,8) Although 351 violations were found during the reporting period, the government did not impose any penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor. (3)

The LRA established a reciprocal referral mechanism for victims of human trafficking, in which the LRA informs the MPS via an online portal. (11) However, investigations are not disaggregated by type of exploitation related to the worst forms of child labor. There are reports that the MPS and social services providers did not have a clear understanding of the differences between sex trafficking and sexual abuse, especially in cases of children; this made the true number of sex trafficking victims unknown. (9) In 2020, the MPS reported a total of 400 investigations of criminal violations involving the worst forms of child labor, compared to 80 investigations in 2019. (21) Of these, 335 were cases involving commercial sexual exploitation, 120 of which resulted in prosecution. The MPS also reported 65 incidents of children being used in illicit activities, including drug trafficking, of which 20 cases were prosecuted. (21)

#### IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

**Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor**

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Anti-Human Trafficking Steering Committee	Manages all anti-human trafficking activities and implements the country's Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan. Chaired by Ministry of Defense leadership and consists of 10 participating government agencies. (9,14,31) In 2020, worked to reprioritize the Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan in light of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. (3)

#### V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including coverage of all forms of child labor.

**Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor**

Policy	Description
Anti-Human Trafficking National Action Plan (2020–2022)†	Establishes the government's goals to combat human trafficking, including creating institutions, coordinating activities, raising awareness, and building capacity. (32) During the reporting period, several key initiatives were underway, including revising the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act to align the definition of human trafficking with that of the 2000 United Nations Trafficking In Persons Protocol, setting up a dedicated Trafficking In Persons office, setting up a permanent shelter for victims of trafficking, and holding a public awareness campaign against trafficking in persons in association with multiple stakeholders. (3)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Research found no evidence of a policy designed to address other relevant forms of child labor, such as forced labor in domestic work or trafficking drugs.

#### VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy to address the problem in all sectors.

**Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor**

Program	Description
Family and Child Service Centers†	Nineteen Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services-operated centers that provide psychosocial support for child victims of abuse and exploitation, four of which provide temporary shelter for victims. (3,30)
National Victim Support Hotline (Number 1696)†	Ministry of Economic Development-operated hotline dedicated to receiving reports of human trafficking and child labor. Supported by MPS and Maldives Immigration. (33)
Child Helpline (Number 1412)†	Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Services-operated helpline established with the support of MPS and UNICEF to receive reports of child abuse cases. (30)

† Program is funded by the Government of Maldives.

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Research was unable to determine what activities were undertaken during the reporting period to implement existing social programs. (8) Family and Child Service centers and shelters lack adequate financial and human resources, and staff are inadequately trained to deal with cases involving abused and exploited children. (30) Existing social programs do not specifically address the commercial sexual exploitation of children, use of children for drug trafficking, or forced labor in domestic work. (8)

## VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Maldives (Table I I).

**Table I I. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor**

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Determine the types of hazardous work prohibited for children in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations.	2009 – 2020
	Criminally prohibit all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children, including procuring, offering, and using children for pornographic performances.	2016 – 2020
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2020
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspectors receive training that specifically focuses on child labor issues, including training for new employees and refresher courses.	2009 – 2020
	Establish a referral mechanism between labor enforcement authorities and social services.	2016 – 2020
	Ensure that the labor inspectorate receives sufficient resources to enforce child labor laws, including to cover the substantial travel expenses entailed by conducting inspections in the outlying islands.	2017 – 2020
	Ensure that there is sufficient coordination between the labor inspectorate and the Maldives Inland Revenue Authority so that fines authorized by the labor inspectorate are collected.	2019 – 2020
	Provide sufficient funding and training to the police, prosecutors, and other officials, and ensure that investigators have the resources necessary to enforce laws on the worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement imposes penalties for violations related to the worst forms of child labor.	2020
	Ensure that criminal investigations are disaggregated by type of exploitation related to the worst forms of child labor.	2020
Government Policies	Ensure that the Maldives Police Service and social services providers receive training on the differences between sex trafficking and sexual abuse, especially in cases involving children.	2020
Government Policies	Adopt a policy to address all relevant forms of child labor and forced labor, including domestic work and trafficking of drugs.	2014 – 2020
Social Programs	Conduct and publish a national child labor survey and research on the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children.	2009 – 2020
	Publish information about activities undertaken to implement social programs.	2017 – 2020
	Provide sufficient funding, human resources, and staff training for Family and Child Service centers and shelters that serve abused and exploited children.	2018 – 2020
	Implement and provide sufficient resources for programs that address the worst forms of child labor, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children, the use of children for drug trafficking, and forced labor in domestic work.	2009 – 2020

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