



Analysis of child labour legislation in Liberia

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International
COCOA
Initiative

Protecting children and their families in cocoa growing communities

The International Cocoa Initiative is a non-profit partnership organisation dedicated to improving the lives of children and adults in cocoa growing communities. We are experts on child labour and forced labour in cocoa, advising governments and corporations to inform their practices and influence decisions-making, and working with NGOs in the field. We are committed to achieving sustainable cocoa production that protects the rights of children and adults worldwide.

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Context

Child labour exists in every country. It deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity. It harms children mentally, physically, socially, and morally. It interferes with their schooling, preventing them from attending or concentrating. It may involve them being enslaved, separated from their families, and exposed to serious hazards and illnesses.

Governments have responded to the situation through the enactment, ratification or strengthening of their national legislation, and the setup of social protection programmes such as access to education, poverty reduction initiatives and awareness raising campaigns.

Liberia is a signatory to many international conventions and protocols, including:

- the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (**CRC**, 1989, the most ratified children's convention in the world)
- the ILO **Convention 182** on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999).

These Conventions govern child labour laws, regulate, and help prevent violations of children's rights. Following these, Liberia has enacted legislation to protect children from harm work, such as the Liberia's Children Law in 2011.

Definition of a child in Liberia

Liberia's Children Law, 2011, under Article 1 (Section 3) defines key terms used in the context of the Law. In conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Children's Law states that a "**child shall mean any person below the age of 18 years**".

Child rights

Article III of Children's Law (2011) provides the following as child rights in Liberia:

1. The right to life
2. The right to a name and identity
3. The right to know and be brought up by parents
4. The right to parental guidance
5. The right to an adequate standard of living
6. The right to access medically necessary health care
7. The right to education
8. The right to adequate food and water
9. The right to adequate shelter
10. The right to adequate clothing
11. The right to leisure, play, and recreation
12. The right to expression and access to information
13. Freedom of thought and religion
14. Freedom of association

15. The right to benefit from inheritance
16. The right to privacy
17. The right to participate in cultural activities
18. The right to be protected from harmful work and other practices that may threaten her or his health, educational, spiritual, physical, and moral development
19. The right to be protected from abuse and exploitation
20. The right to be protected from involvement in armed conflicts and violence

What is “light work” in Liberia?

The ILO Convention No. 138 allows children to perform light work from 13 years, as long as the work does not fall under the scope of the worst forms of child labour and does not interfere with the child's education and physical and mental development. Light work helps develop a child's skills and encourages the child to learn family responsibility.

Light work for children under the age of 15

Light work constitutes work which is not likely to be harmful to the health or development of the child and does not affect the child's attendance at school or the capacity of the child to benefit from schoolwork. The Liberian Decent Work Act, 2015 states that “a child who is at least 13 years old may be employed to perform light work provided that:

- a. The child works for a maximum of 2 hours a day or 14 hours a week
- b. The work is in compliance with any prescribed procedures.”

Minimum Age of Employment

The Liberian Labour Practices Law (Section 74) and The Decent Work Act, 2015 (Section 21.2) sets the minimum age of employment at 15 years. Decent Work Act, 2015 (21.2) states that “*No person shall employ or allow a child under the age of 15 years to be employed in full-time employment*”.

Section 21.5 of the Act makes provisions for some clarification and detailed explanation:

- a. A child who has not yet attained the age of 16 years may not be employed for more than 7 hours in any day, or for more than 42 hours in any working week
- b. Daily hours of work for children shall include one or more rest periods totalling at least one hour, with rest periods so arranged that a child does not work for more than four consecutive hours
- c. Children shall be entitled to annual leave, and in addition to a further period of annual leave equivalent to the number of working days in one (1) week
- d. An employer shall keep a register of all employed children, which shall clearly show their names, and also their ages and their dates of birth, duly certified wherever possible
- e. An employer shall keep the records required under this section throughout the employment of any child, and for a period of five years following the termination of their employment.

Liberia has not ratified the International Labour Organisation (ILO) **Convention 138** on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (1973). The minimum age for work is not in compliance with international standards, as it allows children younger than age 16 to engage in work as long as it is outside of school hours, the employer keeps records of the child's schooling, and the child is literate and attends school regularly. Because of this, children of any age may be vulnerable to child labour. Although the Decent Work Act prohibits children younger than age 15 from working full time, it does not prevent children below this age from engaging in part-time employment.

Working Ages under Convention 138

Type of work	Minimum legal age at which children are allowed to work according to International Standards*	Minimum legal age at which children are allowed to work in Liberia
Light work	13 -15 years	13 years
Minimum age of employment	15 years	15 years
Hazardous work	18 years (16 years under certain conditions)	18 years

* ILO Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment

What is “child labour” in Liberia?

The Decent Work Act (2015) with the provisions of the ILO Convention 182 defines Child Labour as “*any work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, dignity and undermines their physical and psychological development*”. It includes all work that:

- Are mentally, emotionally, socially and morally dangerous and harmful to children
- Restrict or deprive children of their opportunity to attend school and force children to leave school prematurely
- Make children combine school and laborious work for excessive periods of time.

Every child shall have the right to be protected from work and other practices that may threaten her or his health, educational, spiritual, physical, and moral development

(Article II, Section 20 of the Children’s Law 2011)

What are the “worst forms of child labour” in Liberia?

ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour – which Liberia ratified in 2003 and has made provisions in the Decent Work Act (2015) – defines the worst forms of child labour as:

- all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict

2. the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances
3. the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs
4. work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (hazardous work).

The fourth category, which describes “work that is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of the children,” is generally referred to as hazardous work (ILO Recommendation No. 190).

The international community has recognized the urgent need to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

What is “hazardous child labour” in Liberia?

This is any work that by its nature or the circumstances under which it is carried out is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children. (ILO C182, C138 and C184).

Section 9.1 of Children Law (2011) states: “No person shall employ a child in work that is inappropriate for the child’s age or that may be hazardous to the child’s health, educational, emotional or physical development. This prohibition applies to all work undertaken by children, regardless of whether the work is under a contractual relationship, and regardless of whether the work is for payment or other reward.”

Hazardous child labour is work in dangerous or unhealthy conditions that could result in a child being killed or injured or made ill as a consequence of poor safety and health standards and working arrangements. It can result in permanent disability, ill health and psychological damage.

The Decent Work Act (2005) defines hazardous work in the following:

- a. Work which exposes children to physical, psychological and sexual abuse
- b. Work underground, underwater, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces
- c. Work in an unhealthy environment which may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to their health
- d. Work under particularly difficult conditions, such as working for long hours or during the night, or work where the child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer.

The Decent Work Act (2005) puts the minimum age for engaging in hazardous activities at 18 years.

Article VII of Children’s Law (2011), section 1.2 (w & x) states that a child is in a situation of special vulnerability if she or he:

- (w) is involved in work that is hazardous to her or his physical, social, or educational development, such as hunting
- (x) has been given by parents or guardians to work for a relative or on a farm.

Liberia Hazardous Activities

The Hazardous Activities of Liberia have been designed for the Agricultural Sector within which the Cocoa specific activities are calved. The key activities within the agricultural sectors include:

- a. Carrying heavy loads unsuitable to the child’s age and / or physical development

- b. Weeding and harvesting
- c. Caring for and/or slaughtering farm animals
- d. Hunting wildlife
- e. Herding cattle
- f. The processing and preservation of fish and meat products
- g. Work in any way connected to fishing, including deep-sea fishing and diving to chase fish into nets
- h. Handling, mixing, or spraying agrochemicals, including pesticides, herbicides and insecticides
- i. Climbing trees, e.g., to trim the trees, to pick fruit or to collect latex from rubber trees
- j. Using sharp or motorized farm tools
- k. Driving tractors or other farm machinery
- l. Tilling soil
- m. Work involving woodworking machines, circular saws, guillotine saws, files, grinders, or mixers
- n. The installation, excavation, cleaning, or repair of a well
- o. The preservation of food or other perishables by freezing
- p. Adding chemicals to masticated rubber
- q. Vulcanizing rubber at high temperatures
- r. Arduous outdoor work involving heavy lifting, pulling, pushing or any other type of related labour

Key provisions of Liberia's Constitution regarding child labour

- Article 6: Equal access to education
- Article 8: Non-discrimination in employment, equal opportunities for employment, and safe, healthy employment conditions
- Article 11: Equality of citizens before the law, non-discrimination, right to life, liberty, and property
- Article 12: Prohibition of slavery and forced labour
- Article 13: Freedom of movement
- Article 18: Equal opportunity for work and employment without discrimination and equal pay

Enforcement of Child Labour Laws in Liberia

The government of Liberia has set up institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labour. Key agencies responsible for child labour law enforcement include:

Agencies Responsible for Child Labour Law Enforcement in Liberia

No	Organization/Agency	Role
1	Ministry of Labour (MOL)	Conduct worksite inspections and address child labour violations

2	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection	Assist the MOL with the investigation of child labour cases and act as the lead advisory agency on policy formulation, coordination, and monitoring of child protection policies through its Children Protection and Development Division. Monitor the government's efforts on compliance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, UN CRC, and the African Union protocols on women and children.
3	Liberia National Police (LNP) Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS)	Investigate human trafficking cases involving women and children under the guidance of the LNP.
4	LNP Anti-Trafficking Unit	Ensure that human trafficking training is integrated into police orientation. Collaborate with the WACPS to investigate human trafficking cases
5	Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization	Enforce the Alien and Nationality Law of Liberia and protect the border from illegal entry of migrants. Aid in combating human trafficking by detecting fraudulent immigration document
6	Liberian Transnational Crime Unit	Coordinate responses to international organized criminal activities, including monitoring and prosecuting criminal violations involving arms, human trafficking, and drug trafficking
7	Ministry of Justice (MOJ)	Promote and execute the rule of law for public safety, including the prosecution of child labor perpetrators

Government policies and programmes for the prevention of child labour

Key Policies Related to Child Labour

No	Policy	Description
1	National Action Plan for Trafficking in Persons	Outlines the government's anti-human trafficking efforts, including those for child victims. Research found no information about accomplishments during the year
2	Direct Assistance and Support to Trafficked Victims Standard Operation Procedures	Establishes roles and responsibilities for coordinating government assistance to human trafficking victims. Provides shelter and care to children who may have been human trafficking victims. Research found no information about accomplishments during the year.
3	National Social Welfare	Policy Prioritizes the development of action plans and policies that target children engaged in the worst forms of child labour, including child trafficking. (48) Research found no information about accomplishments during the year.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labour

No	Program	Description
1	Anti-Trafficking Awareness Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government of Liberia program led by the MOL, uses radio and billboard messages to raise public awareness on human trafficking
2	USDOL-Funded Projects to Combat Child Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actions to Reduce Child Labour in Areas of Rubber Production (2012–2022): project implemented by Winrock International to combat child labor in the rubber sector Global Action Program on Child Labor, project implemented by the ILO that aims to build the capacity of the national government and develop strategic policies to address the elimination of child labor and forced labour in Liberia.
3	U.S. Government-Funded Projects on Education for Adolescent Girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Government-funded projects that aim to improve access to education and improve child protection.

- Providing Support for the Education of Girls with disabilities, project implemented by USAID with partnership and support from Liberia's Ministry of Education
- Increasing Support for Out-of-School Girls and Youth, implemented by USAID
- Advancing Youth Program, implemented by the Education Development Center
- McGovern-Dole International Food For Education and Child Nutrition Program; and Girls Leading Our World Camps (2014–2022), implemented by the Peace Corps. Through programs of the USDOS Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, female high school students participate in short and long-term exchanges to promote education, empowerment, and leadership skills

Laws and Regulations on child labour in Liberia

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	National legislations
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 74 of the Labour Law • Article 21.2 of the Decent Work Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 7, Section 9.1 of the Children's Law
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 21.4 of the Decent Work Act
Prohibition of Forced Labour	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 2.2 of the Decent Work Act • Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law • Article 12 of the Constitution • Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 7, Section 8 of the Children's Law • Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia

Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act Article 3, Section 21 of the Children's Law Article 1, Section 5 of the Act to Ban Trafficking in Persons Within the Republic of Liberia
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 2.3 of the Decent Work Act Chapter 16 of the Penal Code
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 3, Section 22 of the Children's Law
Compulsory Education Age	No	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law Chapter 4 of the Education Reform Act
Free Public Education	Yes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Article 3, Section 9 of the Children's Law

Key takeaways on the legal environment on child labour in Sierra Leone

Liberia has ratified some key international conventions concerning child labour such as the – the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989); the ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999; the UN CRC, Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. The Government has also established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labour. Despite these, gaps exist to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labour, particularly children of 15 years old. The one-year break between the compulsory education age and the minimum age for work. This is because in Liberia compulsory education age is 14 years. This standard makes 15-year-old children vulnerable to child labour, because they are not required to attend school but are not legally permitted to work until age 16.

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8. ILO Convention n°138 of (1973) on minimum age for admission to employment and recommendation n°146
9. ILO Convention n°182 of (1999) on WFCL and recommendation n°190
10. United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC)