

In 2017, Iraq made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. Iraq is receiving this assessment because it continued practices that delayed advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor, specifically the recruitment of child soldiers. In 2017, armed groups engaged in combat against ISIS, including units of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), which were affiliated with the Iraqi security services, recruited and used children. The government supported the reopening of 100 schools in west Mosul, serving 75,000 students, and provided additional educational opportunities for Syrian refugee children, as a result of which the number of out-of-school Syrian children dropped by over 50,000. Moreover, the government adopted a new policy to address child labor, including through educational and social services, and re-opened a shelter for victims of human trafficking. Despite these efforts, children in Iraq engage in other worst forms of child labor, including forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Labor law enforcement suffers from an insufficient number of labor inspectors and a lack of funding for inspections, authority to assess penalties, and labor inspector training. The government also continues to lack programs that focus on assisting children involved in the worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Iraq engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in armed conflict and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1; 2; 3; 4; 5) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Iraq.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	5.3 (454,330)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	75.0
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	4.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		Unavailable

Primary completion rate was unavailable from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (6)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4, 2011. (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
Agriculture	Farming (8; 9; 1)
	Herding livestock (8; 9)
	Fishing, activities unknown (8; 1)
Industry	Construction (9; 1)
	Making bricks (10; 11; 12; 13; 1)
	Working in factories, including glass, household cleaners, paint, steel, and plastic recycling factories (14; 10; 11; 15)
Services	Working in carpentry workshops (9; 16)
	Street work, including selling goods, pushing carts, cleaning cars, and begging (8; 11; 13; 15; 17; 18; 19)
	Working at gas stations† and auto repair shops (8; 12; 20; 21; 22)
	Working in landfills, scavenging and collecting garbage† (8; 11; 12; 13; 15; 17)
	Domestic work (8; 9)

Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Working in hotels, restaurants, and cafes (9; 22)
	Working at cemeteries, including digging graves and selling items (13; 23)
	Voluntarily recruited children used in hostilities by state armed groups (1)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Recruitment of children by non-state armed groups for use in armed conflict (2; 1)
	Use in illicit activities, including drug trafficking, as a result of human trafficking (24; 3)
	Domestic work as a result of human trafficking (25; 3; 26; 27)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3; 1)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (11; 13; 25; 28; 29; 4; 5)

[†] 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.

The UN reported that Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) units recruited and used children in militia activities and manning checkpoints or providing support at checkpoints. (1; 2) A 2016 law had formalized the status of the Popular Mobilization Committee (PMC), an umbrella organization for the PMF, within the Iraqi state structure. In early 2018, the Prime Minister issued an order further incorporating the PMC into the Iraqi defense forces. (30) Despite the formal incorporation of the PMF into the security services, the government struggled to assert control over all PMF units. (31) Research did not find evidence that the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police used children in armed conflict. (32)

ISIS recruited children, including girls, and used them in combat operations, for example as suicide bombers and human shields. (1; 2) ISIS also continued to use children in its propaganda materials online. (2) Armed groups, including Sunni tribal forces, Yezidi Resistance Forces, Yezidi Women’s Protection Units (YPJ), and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which were outside the Iraqi Government’s control and were engaged in combat against ISIS, also recruited and used children. (1; 2) In Kirkuk, a militia group also provided a voluntary, 3-month training for 100 Shia Turkmen boys ages 15 and older on how to participate in combat. (31)

ISIS fighters subjected girls, primarily from the Yezidi community but also from other ethnic and religious groups, to sexual slavery, forced marriages, or forced domestic work in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. (33; 34; 35; 3; 4; 5; 31) Throughout the country, some girls were subjected to commercial sexual exploitation through temporary marriages. (3) This practice involves a dowry paid to the girl’s family and an agreement to dissolve the marriage after a predetermined length of time. (36) ISIS sold boys who they considered too young or too weak to engage in armed conflict into forced domestic work. (26; 27) Limited evidence points to trafficking of girls from Iran into the Iraqi Kurdistan Region for commercial sexual exploitation. Some officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were involved in the trafficking of Syrian refugee girls for commercial sexual exploitation. (37; 3) Child laborers were also exposed to sexual violence and abuse. (13)

Children faced numerous barriers to accessing education, including attacks on schools and specific targeting of teachers and school personnel. Other barriers included the lack of schools nearby, the use of schools as shelters by internally displaced persons (IDPs) and as detention centers by ISIS, costs of transportation and school supplies, lack of sufficient educational facilities, and IDPs’ and refugees’ lack of identification documents. (13; 25; 38; 39; 1) Many children, especially girls, dropped out of school in Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city, when ISIS occupied it in 2014. ISIS closed schools and used the school curriculum to indoctrinate and recruit child soldiers, by normalizing violence. (18; 40; 41; 42) Despite the reopening of many schools, approximately 1.2 million children throughout Iraq remained out of school as of October 2017. (43) While estimates vary, at least 10,000 Syrian refugee children were out of formal and informal education in 2017. (44; 45) For these refugees, the majority of whom live in the Kurdistan Region, access to education was limited because of security concerns, school-related costs such as transportation and uniforms, and language issues, because most classes in the Kurdistan Region are taught in Kurdish rather than Arabic. (46)




As of December 2017, more than 2.2 million people were internally displaced, including 1.3 million children, and approximately 3.2 million people had recently returned to newly accessible areas, many of whom found their homes and schools damaged or destroyed. (47)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Iraq has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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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 Iraq's legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor, including the prohibition of child trafficking.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Related Entity	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Iraq	Yes	15	Article 7 of the 2015 Labor Law (48)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes	15	Article 90.1 of the 1987 Labor Law (49)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Iraq	Yes	18	Article 95 of the 2015 Labor Law (48)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes	18	Articles 90.2 and 91.1 of the 1987 Labor Law (49)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Iraq	Yes		Articles 95 and 98 of the 2015 Labor Law; Ministry of Labor's Instruction 19 of 1987 (48; 50)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Article 91.2 of the 1987 Labor Law; Ministry of Labor's Instruction 19 of 1987 (49; 50)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Iraq	Yes		Article 9 of the 2015 Labor Law; Articles 1 and 6 of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking (48; 51)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Articles 91.3(a), 91.4, and 97 of the 1987 Labor Law (49)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Iraq	No		Articles 1 and 6 of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking (51)
	Kurdistan Region	No		Articles 91.3(a), 91.4, and 97 of the 1987 Labor Law (49)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Iraq	Yes		Articles 399 and 403 of the Penal Code (52)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Articles 91.3(b), 91.4, and 97 of the 1987 Labor Law (49)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Iraq	No		
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Articles 91.3(c), 91.4, and 97 of the 1987 Labor Law (49)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment				
State Compulsory	Iraq and Kurdistan Region	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Iraq and Kurdistan Region	Yes	18	Section 6(2) of the CPA Order 22 (53)
Non-state	Iraq and Kurdistan Region	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Iraq	No	12‡	Articles 8.1.1 and 11.1 of the Education Law; Article 1.3 of the Law on Compulsory Education (54; 55)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes	15	Articles 6 and 10 of the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Education Law (56)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (cont)

Standard	Related Entity	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Free Public Education	Iraq	Yes		Article 34.2 of the Constitution; Article 9 of the Education Law (54; 57)
	Kurdistan Region	Yes		Article 10 of the Kurdistan Regional Government Ministry of Education Law (56)

* No conscription (53)

‡ Age calculated based on available information

In Iraq, Article 1 of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking requires force or coercion to be present as an element of the crime of child trafficking, which is inconsistent with international standards, including Article 3 of the Palermo Protocol. (51) The Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament must endorse laws passed by the Government of Iraq after 1991 for such laws to enter into force in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, which comprises the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaimaniya. (58; 31) The Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament has not endorsed the Iraqi Law to Combat Human Trafficking, and the only law in effect in the Kurdistan region prohibiting trafficking, the 1987 Labor Law, mentions child trafficking but does not prohibit the necessary elements of a child trafficking crime. (31; 49)

Moreover, in Iraq, the provisions of the 2015 Labor Law protecting children from hazardous work do not apply to children ages 15 to 17 working in family businesses under the authority of family members. (48)

Under the Iraqi Education Law and under the Law on Compulsory Education, children are required to attend primary school for 6 years, which is typically up to age 12. (54; 55; 59) This standard makes children ages 12 to 15 particularly vulnerable to child labor, because they are not required to be in school, yet they are not legally permitted to work.

In 2016, the Council of Ministers directed the Ministry of Justice to draft an amendment to the Education Law that would extend compulsory education through secondary school. (60) In the same year, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs discussed a draft child protection law that includes provisions on child labor. (14) Neither of the two drafts was adopted into law in 2017. (1)

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 authority of MOLSA that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA)	Enforce child labor laws and regulations through its Child Labor Unit. Conduct research on child labor through its Childhood Welfare Authority. (20) Receive complaints of child labor cases. (14)
Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs	Enforce child labor laws and regulations in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. KRG Ministry of Interior's police units play a supporting role in the daily activities of the Ministry. (20)
Ministry of Interior	Enforce criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor. Collaborate with MOLSA, the Iraqi Industries Federation, and the Confederation of Trade Unions to conduct inspection campaigns. (20) Maintain a hotline for victims of human trafficking that is routed directly to the Ministry's Anti-Trafficking Department. (20)
KRG Ministry of Interior	Investigate cases of commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. (14)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2017, labor law enforcement agencies in Iraq took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority and operations of MOLSA that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including an insufficient number of labor inspectors, and lack of funding for inspections, authority to assess penalties, and labor inspector training.

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown* (14)	Unknown* (1)
Number of Labor Inspectors	120 (14)	98 (1)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (48)	No (48)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (60)	No (1)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Unknown (14)	N/A
Refresher Courses Provided	No (60)	No (1)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (61)	9,129 (1)
Number Conducted at Worksites	1,076 (60)	Unknown (1)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	325 (60)	0 (1)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	229 (60)	N/A
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	Unknown	N/A
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (14)	Yes (1)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (14)	Yes (1)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (48)	Yes (1)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Unknown* (14)	Unknown* (1)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (14)	Yes (1)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Unknown (14)	Yes (1)

* The government does not publish this information.

In 2017, research did not find information about the funding of MOLSA. However, in 2016, officials had stated that their funding was limited. (20) In 2015, insufficient transportation and fuel hampered MOLSA's capacity to enforce child labor laws. (20) The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Iraq's workforce, which includes over 8.9 million workers. (62) According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in industrializing economies, Iraq would employ about 593 labor inspectors. (63; 64) MOLSA carried out joint inspections with the Ministry of Education and reported a total number of 9,129 inspections. (1)

In 2017, the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs did not have budgetary allocations for inspections, did not provide child labor training to inspectors, and its 60 labor inspectors did not carry out inspections. (1)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Iraq took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including training for criminal investigators and prosecution planning.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Unknown (14)	No (1)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (14)	No (1)
Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (14)	No (1)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (14)	Unknown (1)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (14)	0 (1)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (14)	0 (1)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (14)	0 (1)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Unknown (14)	Yes (1)

Iraq

MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – EFFORTS MADE BUT CONTINUED PRACTICE THAT DELAYED ADVANCEMENT

In 2017, neither the Government of Iraq nor the KRG provided training for criminal investigators. (1) KRG officials stated that courts could refer cases of the worst forms of child labor to the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. (14) Research did not uncover other information on criminal law enforcement, including in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

Some child victims of human trafficking and forced labor were prosecuted for acts committed while being trafficked and underwent deportation proceedings. (3; 34) In August 2017, the Government of Iraq and KRG officials held about 1,000 children in custody due to suspected family affiliation with ISIS members. (65; 2) Lack of sufficient coordination among judicial authorities and security forces across governorates led to re-arrests of some children previously cleared of charges. (32)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including coordination among agencies to effectively process cases of children suspected of having ties with ISIS.

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

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
Inter-ministerial Committee on Child Labor	Coordinate overall government efforts to combat child labor, research policies regarding child labor, and design and manage projects. Members included representatives from MOLSA and four other ministries. (20) Research was unable to determine whether the Inter-ministerial Committee on Child Labor was active during the reporting period.
Joint Committee on Street Children	Coordinate the implementation of measures for removing and rehabilitating street children. Members include MOLSA and the Ministry of Interior. (66) Research was unable to determine whether the Joint Committee on Street Children was active during the reporting period.
Central Committee to Combat Trafficking in Persons	Oversee implementation of the Law to Combat Human Trafficking and serve as the national coordinating body on trafficking in persons. Led by the Ministry of Interior, also includes representatives from five ministries, the KRG Ministry of Interior, and two other state entities. (14; 20) In 2017, the Committee met five times and its members traveled to recently liberated areas to interview internally displaced persons regarding human trafficking. (32) However, due to lack of sufficient coordination between judicial authorities and security forces, some children who were suspected of affiliation with ISIS, cleared of allegations, and released from custody were sometimes re-arrested for the same allegations. (32)
KRG High Commission on Child Labor	Coordinate interagency policies on child labor. Chaired by the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Members include representatives from five other KRG ministries. (14) Research was unable to determine whether the KRG High Commission on Child Labor was active during the reporting period.

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Child Protection Policy (2017–2022)†	Provides a holistic approach to addressing children’s needs, including ameliorating the child labor situation in the country, through prevention, protection, and rehabilitation programs such as a poverty alleviation initiative, and educational and mental health services. (1; 67) Includes a component to provide rehabilitation and reintegration activities for children previously engaged in armed conflict, as well as children who experienced trauma during the period of ISIS occupation. (31)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including services to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Informal Education†	Government-supported informal education systems, including evening school programs and the fast education mode that encourages children ages 12 to 18 who have dropped out of school to continue their education. (66) Research was unable to determine what steps were taken in 2017 to implement this program.
Conditional Subsidies Program†	Provides assistance to low-income families for children to stay in school and out of the workforce. (14) This program was not active in 2017 but resumed activities in 2018. (31)
Shelters for Human Trafficking Victims†	MOLSA-operated shelter in Baghdad for human trafficking victims, including children involved in the worst forms of child labor; other facilities are in Basrah, Kirkuk, and Ninewa provinces. (68) The government addressed security concerns, and the Baghdad shelter reopened in August 2017. (1) During the reporting period, the Ministry of Interior referred five children to the shelter, but it is unclear whether the children used it. (32)

† Program is funded by the Government of Iraq.

In 2017, the government, in cooperation with UNICEF, reopened 100 schools in west Mosul, serving 75,000 students. (43) Likewise, in east Mosul, 437 schools were reopened, resulting in 45,000 children returning to school. (40) The KRG, in cooperation with UNHCR and partners, announced that children successfully enrolled in non-formal education programs would be eligible to be reintegrated into the formal education system. Also, Syrian refugee children enrolling in first grade became eligible to enroll in local schools that used Kurdish as the language of instruction. (69) As a result of these efforts, the number of Syrian refugee children who did not attend formal and non-formal education programs decreased, from 61,000 in 2016 to 10,000 in 2017. (70; 45)

In 2016, the government drafted a plan to rehabilitate and integrate children liberated from ISIS, including child soldiers, back into their communities. In May 2017, the Council of Ministers approved the plan and allocated a budget of approximately \$8.4 million for its implementation. (60) Nevertheless, the funds were not disbursed and the program was not launched. (71)

Research found no evidence of specific active programs to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers or programs to support children engaged in commercial sexual exploitation.

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 Iraq (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the laws comprehensively prohibit child trafficking in all parts of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, and do not require force or coercion for its application, in accordance with international standards.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that hazardous work protections apply to all children, including children working in family businesses under the authority of family members.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the law in Iraq criminally prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2013 – 2017
	Increase the age of compulsory schooling in Iraq to at least age 15, the minimum age for work.	2009 – 2017
Enforcement	Publish information on the funding of the Labor Inspectorate and whether unannounced inspections were conducted.	2011 – 2017
	Authorize the Inspectorate to assess penalties.	2017
	Ensure that labor inspectors and criminal investigators receive training courses on child labor.	2016 – 2017
	Increase the number of labor inspectors to meet the ILO technical advice and ensure adequate funding to effectively enforce legal protections against child labor, including its worst forms.	2011 – 2017
	Ensure that labor inspectors in the Kurdistan Region receive funding and training on child labor to conduct labor inspections.	2016 – 2017

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	Ensure that children under age 18 cannot join armed groups affiliated with the Popular Mobilization Forces to engage in combat.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that criminal investigators carry out investigations to find violations, and that the government prosecutes violators.	2013 – 2017
	Publish information on criminal law enforcement on the worst forms of child labor in the Kurdistan Region.	2013 – 2017
	Ensure that child victims of human trafficking are not prosecuted.	2015 – 2017
Coordination	Ensure all coordinating bodies are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2017
	Through enhanced coordination among government agencies, ensure that children previously cleared of charges related to armed conflict are not at risk of re-arrest and re-prosecution.	2017
Social Programs	Ensure that children are discouraged from enlisting in armed groups and receiving military training.	2015 – 2017
	Ensure that universal access to education is consistent with international standards, including for refugee and internally displaced children.	2013 – 2017
	Implement programs to address child labor in relevant sectors in Iraq, such as commercial sexual exploitation, and demobilize and reintegrate children engaged in armed groups.	2009 – 2017

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