

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government of Mauritius created the National Children's Council in 1990 to coordinate ministry and NGO efforts to combat child abuse, neglect, and exploitation.²⁸³² Since 1999, the Council has participated in the National Action Plan to Combat Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.²⁸³³ Plan activities include conducting workshops in schools and women's associations, creating special police groups to encourage more reporting of sexual exploitation, and using social welfare and community centers to raise awareness about commercial sexual exploitation.²⁸³⁴ In 2000, the government released a comprehensive study on child prostitution, which was carried out in cooperation with UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO).²⁸³⁵ The government is currently working with social partners to develop a comprehensive policy on child labor.²⁸³⁶

In the 2002–2003 school year, spending on primary education was roughly 1.4 million rupees (USD 48,000), or 31 percent of the overall education budget.²⁸³⁷ The government announced an education reform plan in 2001 to provide additional secondary schools, increase access to secondary school education, and eventually increase the mandatory education age to 16.²⁸³⁸ Through the Priority Zone educational project, 22 secondary schools are being constructed in economically disadvantaged areas.²⁸³⁹ The government assigns a social worker to truant children and their families to reduce school absenteeism.²⁸⁴⁰ Based upon the country's economic performance and government achievements in improving the well being of children and young people, UNICEF announced its intention to close out funding allocations in Mauritius in 2003.²⁸⁴¹

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2001, ILO estimated that 1.8 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Mauritius were working.²⁸⁴² The 2000 Census of Occupations found that 763 children aged 12 to 14 were working.²⁸⁴³ Children are usually found

²⁸³² ILO, *Individual Observation concerning Convention no. 29, Forced Labor, 1930 Mauritius (ratification: 1969)*, ILO-Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Geneva, 2002; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>.

²⁸³³ Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development of Mauritius, *National Children's Council*, [online] [cited August 14, 2003]; available from <http://women.gov.mu/child/ssncc.htm>.

²⁸³⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Mauritius*, Washington, D.C., June 2003; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21276.htm>.

²⁸³⁵ ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

²⁸³⁶ N. Nababsing, survey questionnaire response to USDOL official, September 2001, 3. UNICEF has agreed to fund a new study on child labor in the informal sector for the Ministry of Labour and Employment. The research will be conducted by specialists in the University of Mauritius and will be used to develop strategies to combat child labor. See U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*, August 18, 2003.

²⁸³⁷ U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*. For currency conversion, see FXConverter, [online] [cited August 27, 2003]; available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

²⁸³⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Mauritius*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18216.htm>.

²⁸³⁹ U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*.

²⁸⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Mauritius*.

²⁸⁴¹ In 1997, the UNICEF Executive Board decided to gradually phase out funding allocations for countries that had achieved established threshold levels for gross national product (USD 2,895 per capita) and under 5 mortality rates (30 deaths per 1000). In the 1990s, Mauritius reached these thresholds. See UNICEF, *At a Glance: Mauritius*, UNICEF, [online] August 13, 2003 [cited August 14, 2003]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mauritius.html>.

²⁸⁴² World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003.

²⁸⁴³ U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*. For purposes of comparison, there were 97,713 children in the 10–14 age group in Mauritius in 2000. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Data Base, [online] December 16, 2003 [cited December 17, 2003]; available from <http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg>.

working on the streets, in small businesses, and in agriculture.²⁸⁴⁴ On the island of Rodrigues, children reportedly work in homes, on farms, and in shops.²⁸⁴⁵ In 1998, the UNICEF/WHO study on commercial sexual exploitation of children indicated that children as young as 13 are engaged in prostitution in several districts in Mauritius.²⁸⁴⁶ Although there had been reports in previous years of children being trafficked from Madagascar to Mauritius for prostitution, there were no such reports in 2002.²⁸⁴⁷

The Education Act provides for compulsory and free primary schooling until the age of 12.²⁸⁴⁸ In addition, the government provides subsidies for the school fees of each 4-year old to ensure that children start primary school with at least one year of preschool experience.²⁸⁴⁹ In 1998, approximately 96 percent of the children entering primary school had completed at least one year of pre-primary schooling.²⁸⁵⁰ In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate was 108.6 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 94.7 percent.²⁸⁵¹ Attendance rates are not available for Mauritius. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not necessarily reflect children's participation in school.²⁸⁵²

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Act of 1975 set the minimum age for employment at 15 years.²⁸⁵³ Under the Occupational Safety, Health, and Welfare Act of 1989, young persons between the ages of 15 and 18 are not allowed to work in activities that are harmful to health, dangerous, or otherwise unsuitable for a young person.²⁸⁵⁴ The Criminal Code contains provisions prohibiting child prostitution, and the sale, trafficking, and abduction of children.²⁸⁵⁵ The

²⁸⁴⁴ Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 3.

²⁸⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Mauritius*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 459-61, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8393.htm>.

²⁸⁴⁶ ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*. See also Nasseem Ackbarally, *Report Says Child Prostitution Rampant in Mauritius*, [online] [cited August 14, 2003]; available from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/36/313.html>.

²⁸⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Mauritius*.

²⁸⁴⁸ Children begin primary school at the age of 5 and are expected to complete primary education at age 12. See Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 3, 10.

²⁸⁴⁹ UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessments: Country Reports - Mauritius*, prepared by Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 52/84, [cited August 13, 2002]; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/mauritius/contents.html>. At the end of the sixth grade, students must take a nationally administered test to qualify for secondary school. In 1997, the repetition rate for sixth grade was 21 percent, and 63 percent of the students obtained a certificate of primary education. See UNESCO, *EFA 2000 Report: Mauritius*.

²⁸⁵⁰ UNESCO, *EFA 2000 Report: Mauritius*.

²⁸⁵¹ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*. For an explanation of gross primary enrollment and/or attendance rates that are greater than 100 percent, please see the definitions of gross primary enrollment rate and gross primary attendance rate in the glossary of this report.

²⁸⁵² For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

²⁸⁵³ Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 1. The country's child labor laws cover all sectors.

²⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. Children are allowed to work on some dangerous machines, provided they are trained to operate machinery and are supervised by an experienced operator. They are not required to clean machinery if this would expose them to the risk of injury. In addition, children under 18 are not permitted to work more than six hours per day between the hours of 6 P.M. and 6 A.M. See U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*.

²⁸⁵⁵ The Criminal Code was amended in 1998. See ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

penalties for persons convicted of the sale, trafficking or abduction of a child are a fine of least 10,000 rupees (USD 343) or a prison sentence not to exceed five years.²⁸⁵⁶ Forced and bonded labor by children is illegal.²⁸⁵⁷

The Ministry of Labor and Industrial Relations enforces child labor laws. In 2002, labor inspectors conducted 4,728 inspections and found 19 instances of child labor.²⁸⁵⁸ When an instance of child labor is found, inspectors warn violators before applying fines not to exceed 2,000 rupees (USD 69) to repeat offenders.²⁸⁵⁹ The police enforce laws on child prostitution. According to a June 2000 report by the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the existing legal provisions on child prostitution were inadequate to effectively prosecute child sexual exploitation, and there was insufficient police resolve, capacity, and sensitivity to intervene in cases of child prostitution.²⁸⁶⁰

The Government of Mauritius ratified ILO Convention 138 on July 30, 1990 and ILO Convention 182 on June 8, 2000.²⁸⁶¹

²⁸⁵⁶ Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 3. For currency conversion, see FXConverter, available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

²⁸⁵⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Mauritius*, Section 6c.

²⁸⁵⁸ U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*.

²⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶⁰ *ILO, Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

²⁸⁶¹ *ILO, Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited August 18, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>.