

The Gambia

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

UNICEF estimated that 26.9 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years in the Gambia were working in 2000.¹⁶⁵⁶ Children in rural areas mainly work on family farms and assist with housework. Many girls in rural areas leave school to work, and some migrate to urban areas seeking domestic or other employment.¹⁶⁵⁷ Other sectors where children are known to work are carpentry, sewing, masonry, plumbing, tailoring, and mechanics.¹⁶⁵⁸ In urban areas, children are commonly found working as street vendors or taxi and bus assistants. The number of street children is growing¹⁶⁵⁹ and has led to increased instances of children begging.¹⁶⁶⁰ Consequently, their vulnerability to exploitation has been exacerbated.¹⁶⁶¹

According to UNICEF, commercial sexual exploitation of children is on the rise. The problem is most acute in the sex tourism industry, where young children, especially girls, are coerced by Gambian adults offering gifts and promises of a better or "more Western" life style.¹⁶⁶² Child trafficking is also a problem. As a transit and destination country, the Gambia is a transfer point where children are trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced domestic and commercial labor. Most children are seized from rural areas and moved to urban centers. Many, ultimately, are trafficked to Europe or South America where they are exploited by the pornography industry.¹⁶⁶³

¹⁶⁵⁶ Government of The Gambia in collaboration with UNICEF, *The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey Report*, New York, 2000, Standard Tables for Gambia, Tables 2 and 42a; available from <http://www.childinfo.org/MICS2/newreports/gambia/gambia.htm>. For more information on the definition of working children, please see the section in the front of the report entitled Statistical Definitions of Working Children.

¹⁶⁵⁷ UNICEF, *Country Profile: UNICEF in The Gambia, Programme Cycle: 1999-2003*; available from <http://www.ungambia.gm/unicef/profile.html>.

¹⁶⁵⁸ U.S. Embassy- Banjul, *unclassified telegram no. 1032*, October 15, 2002.

¹⁶⁵⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties, Concluding Observations: Gambia*, UNICEF, June 11, 2001; available from <http://wwwserver.law.wits.ac.za/humanrts/crc/gambia2001.html>.

¹⁶⁶⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: The Gambia*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27729.htm>. Section 6

¹⁶⁶¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations: Gambia*.

¹⁶⁶² UNICEF, *Child Sex Tourism and Exploitation Increasing in The Gambia*, Press Release, UNICEF, May 5 2004; available from http://www.unicef.org/media/media_20825.html. The Report, "Study on The Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children in Gambia" was a joint project conducted by the Government of the Gambia and UNICEF. The Report cites poverty as the overwhelming factor contributing to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Poverty makes children and their families vulnerable to wealthier adults, or "sugar daddies", who are in a position to use money and gifts to secure sexual access to children. The lure of money and replicating the "Western Lifestyle" is an extremely powerful inducement for young girls in their desperation to escape the abject poverty that defines their existence. These vulnerable girls are often lead to a life of prostitution and or being trafficked to Western Europe. The Report can be accessed at http://www.unicef.org/media/files/gambia_report.doc. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: The Gambia*, Section 6f.

¹⁶⁶³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2004: The Gambia*, Washington, D.C., June 14, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/33189.htm>.

The Constitution mandates free and compulsory primary education to 8 years of age. However, a lack of resources and educational infrastructure has made implementation difficult.¹⁶⁶⁴ Consequently, many families are faced with paying school fees or tuition.¹⁶⁶⁵ In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 78.9 percent and the net primary enrollment rate was 72.9 percent.¹⁶⁶⁶ Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. Recent primary school attendance statistics are not available for the Gambia. As of 1998, 69.2 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.¹⁶⁶⁷ Approximately 20 percent of school-age children attend Koranic schools, which usually have a restricted curriculum.¹⁶⁶⁸

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Gambia's statutory minimum age for employment is 14 years.¹⁶⁶⁹ The legal framework governing child labor in the Gambia is limited, and there are no laws that restrict the sectors in which children can work.¹⁶⁷⁰ Child labor protection does not extend to youths performing traditional chores on family farms or working for petty traders. Employee labor cards list employee ages with the Labor Commissioner, who is authorized to enforce labor laws but performs few enforcement inspections.¹⁶⁷¹ The Criminal Code prohibits procuring a girl under 21 years of age for the purposes of prostitution, either within the Gambia or outside of the country.¹⁶⁷² The Tourism Offenses Act of 2003 carries severe punishments for tourists found guilty of involvement in child prostitution and pornography.¹⁶⁷³

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

The Government of the Gambia began implementing an education initiative in 1998, with USD 15 million in loan support from the World Bank. The project will last until 2005 and is intended to increase the gross enrollment rate to 90 percent, improve educational opportunities for girls,¹⁶⁷⁴ strengthen basic education

¹⁶⁶⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: The Gambia*, Section 5. See also UNICEF and Government of the Gambia, *Programme of Cooperation 1999-2003*; available from <http://www.ungambia.gm/unicef/pdf/mpopart2.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: The Gambia*, Section 6.

¹⁶⁶⁶ The gross primary enrollment rate increased from 64.0 percent in 1990 to 79.0 percent in 2002. World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004.

¹⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶⁸ UNICEF, *Country Profile*.

¹⁶⁶⁹ U.S. Embassy- Banjul, *unclassified telegram no. 1032*.

¹⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: The Gambia*, Section 6d.

¹⁶⁷² Government of The Gambia, *Criminal Code*, as cited in The Protection Project Legal Library, [database online] 1964; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/GambiaF.pdf>.

¹⁶⁷³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2004: The Gambia*.

¹⁶⁷⁴ One method of improving access to education for girls is the Scholarship Trust Fund, which covers the costs of tuition, textbooks, and examination fees for girls at all levels of education. For more information see *Initiatives in Girls Education: The Scholarship Trust Fund*, Secretary of State for Education, [online] [cited June 27, 2003]; available from http://www.edugambia.gm/Directorates/Current_Projects/Girls_Education/body_girls_education.html.

curricula, and improve teacher training.¹⁶⁷⁵ The government continues to fund a countrywide program that pays the school fees for girls enrolled in grades 7 through 12 in public schools.¹⁶⁷⁶ The program also covers girls attending private schools.¹⁶⁷⁷ However, enrollment of girls remains low in rural areas where cultural factors and poverty discourage parents from sending them to school.¹⁶⁷⁸ The President's Empowerment of Girls Education project in the Banjul, Western and North Bank is also being implemented.¹⁶⁷⁹ The U.S. Department of Agriculture is working with the government as part of a global effort to provide meals for schoolchildren.¹⁶⁸⁰

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	9/4/2000	✓
Ratified Convention 182	7/3/2001	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		
National Plan for Children		
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan		

¹⁶⁷⁵ The 1998 project is the continuation of an education program that began in 1988 in the Gambia. See World Bank, *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit in the Amount of SDR 15.0 Million to the Republic of the Gambia for a Third Education Sector Project in Support of the First Phase of the Third Education Sector Program*, No. 17903-GM, August 7, 1998, 3,5. See also World Bank, *Education and Health in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Sector-Wide Approaches*, The Gambia Education Case Study, January 2001, 107. See also *Education Sector Project (03)*, World Bank, [online] June 20, 2003 [cited June 26, 2003]; available from <http://www4.worldbank.org/sprojects/Project.asp?pid=P035643>. The goal of the Gambian government is that every child receives nine years of schooling, with at least 50 percent attending secondary school. See Satang Jow, *Education Management Project*, Secretary of Station for Education, [online] [cited June 27, 2003]; available from http://www.edugambia.gm/Mission_Statement_And_Policy_/Policy_Documents_and_Reports/EMP/body_emp.html.

¹⁶⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: The Gambia*, Section 5.

¹⁶⁷⁷ The Department of State for Education cannot fund the entire program, but works with different partners to ensure financial support. See U.S. Embassy- Banjul, *unclassified telegram no. 0642*, August, 2003.

¹⁶⁷⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: The Gambia*, Section 5.

¹⁶⁷⁹ The U.S. Embassy in Banjul contributes funds to this project through the Education for Development and Democracy Initiative Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Fund. See U.S. Embassy- Banjul, *unclassified telegram no. 0642*.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Washington File, *U.S. Funds Will Provide School Meals in Latin America, Caribbean*, August 17, 2004; available from <http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/Archive/2004/Aug/18-23606.html>.