

# Mauritius

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

The ILO estimated that 1.4 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Mauritius were working in 2002.<sup>2617</sup> Children are usually found working on the streets, in small businesses, and in agriculture.<sup>2618</sup> On the island of Rodrigues, children reportedly work in homes, on farms, and in shops.<sup>2619</sup> Mauritius has an estimated 2,600 child prostitutes and is a source and destination country for children trafficked for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation. Children are also trafficked internally for exploitation in the sex tourism industry.<sup>2620</sup>

The Education Act provides for compulsory and free primary schooling until the age of 12.<sup>2621</sup> The government also subsidizes school fees for 4-year old children to ensure that students begin primary school with at least one year of preschool education.<sup>2622</sup> In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 106.0 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 93.2 percent.<sup>2623</sup> 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 Mauritius. Repetition rates for boys and girls were 4.9 and 3.7 percent respectively in 2001. As of 2000, 99.3 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.<sup>2624</sup> In 2002, 65 percent of students who took part in the Certificate of Primary Education Exam passed.<sup>2625</sup>

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<sup>2617</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004.

<sup>2618</sup> Dr. U. Jeetah, Mauritius embassy official, survey questionnaire response to USDOL official, September 2004, 12.

<sup>2619</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Mauritius*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27739.htm>.

<sup>2620</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*, Washington, D.C., June 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/33189.htm>. 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. See 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>. See also Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development of Mauritius, *Report on Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Mauritius and Rodrigues*, [online] [cited September 27, 2004]; available from <http://women.gov.mu/docs/finalrp.rtf>.

<sup>2621</sup> Children begin primary school at the age of 5 and are expected to complete primary education at age 12. See Dr. U. Jeetah, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004, 3, 10.

<sup>2622</sup> 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, Chapter II [cited June 14, 2004]; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/mauritius/contents.html>.

<sup>2623</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*. For a detailed 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.

<sup>2624</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*.

<sup>2625</sup> Girls performed more successfully on the exam than boys. See Central Statistics Office, *Education Statistics 2003*, online, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Port Louis, Mauritius, January 2004, 8; available from <http://ncb.intnet.mu/education/>.

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Act of 1975 sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years. 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. The Occupational Safety, Health, and Welfare Act of 1988, prohibits young persons, who have not been fully instructed and have not been adequately supervised, from being required to operate dangerous machinery.<sup>2626</sup> The Protection of the Child (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1998 prohibits the handling of explosives by minors and prohibits the employment of a child by a shop owner if the child is under the age of 15 years.<sup>2627</sup> The Merchant Shipping Act includes provisions for children working aboard ships.<sup>2628</sup> The Criminal Code contains provisions prohibiting child prostitution, the keeping of brothels where children are prostituted, the corruption of youth, and the sale, trafficking, and abduction of children.<sup>2629</sup> Violators are fined up to 100,000 rupees (USD 358) or sentenced up to 8 years in prison.<sup>2630</sup> The Constitution prohibits slavery and prostitution.<sup>2631</sup>

The Ministry of Labor and Industrial Relations and Employment (MLIRE) enforces child labor laws. Labor inspectors carry out child labor inspections in the course of their daily routine inspection visits.<sup>2632</sup> Between June 2002 and May 2003, 4,777 inspections were carried out and 17 cases of child labor involving 19 children were found.<sup>2633</sup> Persons identified as employing children receive a warning. Repeat offenders are fined up to 2,000 rupees (USD 69).<sup>2634</sup> The police enforce laws against child prostitution.<sup>2635</sup> In 2003, the government established a Tourism Police Force to monitor trafficking in tourist sites and identify victims of the sex tourism trade.<sup>2636</sup> According to a June 2000 report by the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, existing legal provisions on child prostitution were inadequate to effectively prosecute child sexual exploitation. In addition, the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions

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<sup>2626</sup> Dr. U. Jeetah, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004.

<sup>2627</sup> *Protection of the Child (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1998*, (August 18, 2004); available from [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex\\_browse.byCountry?p\\_lang=en](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.byCountry?p_lang=en).

<sup>2628</sup> R. Sukon, Mauritius embassy official, survey questionnaire response to USDOL official, August 12, 2004, 5.

<sup>2629</sup> The Criminal Code was amended in 1998. See ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*. See also R. Sukon, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004, 3.

<sup>2630</sup> Dr. U. Jeetah, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004, 3. See also R. Sukon, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004, 4. For currency conversion, see FXConverter, [online] [cited May 28, 2004]; available from <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic>.

<sup>2631</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*.

<sup>2632</sup> ILO, *Individual Observation concerning Convention no. 138, Minimum Age, 1973 Mauritius (ratification: 1990)*, ILO-Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Geneva, 2004; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>.

<sup>2633</sup> After employers were warned, the employment of the 19 children was terminated and no prosecutions were made. See Ibid.

<sup>2634</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port Louis, *unclassified telegram no. 658*, August 18, 2003.

<sup>2635</sup> ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

<sup>2636</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*.

and Recommendations has found that there is insufficient police resolve, capacity, and sensitivity to intervene in cases of child prostitution in the country.<sup>2637</sup>

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

The Government of Mauritius has an Office of Ombudsperson for Children. The Ombudsperson promotes compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and protects the rights of children, including the investigation of suspected cases of child labor.<sup>2638</sup> The National Children’s Council, under the authority of the Ministry of Women, Family Welfare and Child Development (MFWFCD), coordinates efforts between governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide for the welfare and protection of children.<sup>2639</sup> The Child Development Unit, also under the MFWFCD, advocates for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensures enforcement of the Child Protection Act, and promotes appropriate child welfare legislation.<sup>2640</sup>

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	7/30/1990	✓
Ratified Convention 182	6/8/2000	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		
National Plan for Children		
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan (Commercial Sexual Exploitation)		✓

The government also has a National Plan of Action on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Abuse including Commercial Sexual Exploitation.<sup>2641</sup> The MFWFCD and the Ministry of Health coordinate a National Sensitization Campaign on Commercial Sexual Exploitation.<sup>2642</sup> In late 2003, the Mauritius Family Planning Association, in collaboration with the MFWFCD, opened a “Drop-In Center” for child victims of sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>2643</sup> The MFWFCD implements a Child Watch Network to coordinate NGOs and professionals working with children to detect cases of child abuse, including child prostitution.<sup>2644</sup> The Ministry has collaborated with the Mauritian Police Force to conduct training for NGOs on combating commercial sexual exploitation of children. The Ministry of Tourism seeks to discourage child prostitution in tourist destinations. The government also sponsors a media campaign to combat sexual exploitation and child prostitution.<sup>2645</sup>

<sup>2637</sup> ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

<sup>2638</sup> *Ombudsperson for Children Act*, (November 10, 2003); available from [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex\\_browse.byCountry?p\\_lang=en](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.byCountry?p_lang=en).

<sup>2639</sup> *Protection of the Child (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1998*.

<sup>2640</sup> Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development of Mauritius, *Children’s Development Unit*, [online] [cited September 27, 2004]; available from <http://women.gov.mu/child/sscdu.htm>.

<sup>2641</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*.

<sup>2642</sup> Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development of Mauritius, *National Children’s Council*, [online] [cited May 6, 2004]; available from <http://women.gov.mu/child/ssncc.htm>.

<sup>2643</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*.

<sup>2644</sup> Ministry of Women, Family Welfare, and Child Development of Mauritius, *Childwatch*, [online] [cited September 27, 2004]; available from <http://women.gov.mu/child/sschildwatch.htm>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*.

<sup>2645</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritius*.

Through the Zones d'Education Prioritaires program, the government has made efforts to improve the performance of low achieving schools in areas experiencing high levels of poverty.<sup>2646</sup> The government has also introduced a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy to ensure that every child leaving primary school has learned to read and write.<sup>2647</sup> Various projects have been introduced to integrate out-of-school children into the school system.<sup>2648</sup> The Industrial and Vocational Training Board provides courses for primary school drop-outs between the ages of 12 to 14 years at pre-vocational Training Centers.<sup>2649</sup> Based upon the country's improved economic performance and government achievements in improving the well-being of children and young people, UNICEF closed-programs in Mauritius at the end of 2003.<sup>2650</sup>

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<sup>2646</sup> Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, *From Special Support Schools to 'Zones d'Education Prioritaires': A New Strategy Built on Partnerships*, June 2002; available from <http://ncb.intnet.mu/education/newstat.htm>. See also R. Sukon, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004, 1.

<sup>2647</sup> The strategy was piloted in 2004 and will be finalized by 2005. See Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, *National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, February 2003; available from <http://ncb.intnet.mu/education/natlit.htm>.

<sup>2648</sup> ILO, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*. The government assigns a social worker to truant children and their families to reduce school absenteeism. See 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>.

<sup>2649</sup> R. Sukon, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2004, 2.

<sup>2650</sup> UNICEF, *At a Glance: Mauritius*, UNICEF, [online] [cited May 6, 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mauritius.html>.