

# Trinidad and Tobago

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

UNICEF estimated that 4.1 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years in Trinidad and Tobago were working in 2000.<sup>3968</sup> Children are engaged in agriculture, scavenging, loading and stocking goods, gardening, car mechanics, car washing, construction, fishing, and begging.<sup>3969</sup> Children also work as handymen, shop assistants, cosmetologists' assistants, domestic servants,<sup>3970</sup> and street vendors.<sup>3971</sup> These activities are usually reported as being part of a family business.<sup>3972</sup> Reports also indicate the involvement of children in commercial sexual exploitation.<sup>3973</sup>

Primary education is free and compulsory between the ages of 6 and 12 years. However, in practice, children tend to attend school between the ages of 6 to 15 years. Enrollment rates for female and male students are relatively equal.<sup>3974</sup> In 2002, the gross primary enrollment rate was 105 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 94 percent.<sup>3975</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. In 2000, 88.7 percent of primary school age children were estimated to be attending school.<sup>3976</sup> The rate of repetition in primary school was 8 percent of total enrollment in the same year.<sup>3977</sup> As of 1999, 99.7 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.<sup>3978</sup> The public school system does not adequately meet the needs of the school age population due to overcrowding, substandard physical facilities, and occasional violence in the classroom perpetrated by gangs.<sup>3979</sup> Eight

---

<sup>3968</sup> Government of Trinidad and Tobago, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2000 -Trinidad and Tobago*, UNICEF, 2000; available from <http://www.childinfo.org/MICS2/newreports/trinidad/trinidad.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.

<sup>3969</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1526*, August 2004.

<sup>3970</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 2243*, October 2002.

<sup>3971</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Trinidad and Tobago*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27921.htm>.

<sup>3972</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1526*.

<sup>3973</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Trinidad and Tobago*, Section 6d. See also U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1604*, September 2001.

<sup>3974</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1604*. See also Dunn, *The Situation of Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, 18.

<sup>3975</sup> See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 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>3976</sup> Government of Trinidad and Tobago, *MICS 2000*.

<sup>3977</sup> The repetition rate for males was slightly higher. See World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*.

<sup>3978</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3979</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Trinidad and Tobago*, Section 5.

percent of working children interviewed in 2002 as part of a rapid assessment demonstrated low levels of education.<sup>3980</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Children’s Act establishes the minimum age for employment at 12 years; prohibits children under 14 years from work in factories, in public industries, or on ships; and permits children 12 to 14 to work only in family businesses.<sup>3981</sup> According to the Children’s Act, children under the age of 18 may work only during daylight hours. Exceptions are made for children involved in family business and children ages 16 to 18 working at night in sugar factories.<sup>3982</sup> There are no laws prohibiting trafficking,<sup>3983</sup> but the Criminal Code prohibits procuring a minor under the age of 16 years for the purpose of prostitution.<sup>3984</sup> The punishment for procurement is 15 years imprisonment.<sup>3985</sup> Trafficking may also be prosecuted under laws that address kidnapping, labor conditions, procurement of sex, prostitution, slavery, and indentured servitude.<sup>3986</sup> The use of children under the age of 16 in pornography is also prohibited.<sup>3987</sup>

The Ministry of Labor and Small and Micro-Enterprise Development and the Social Services Delivery unit in the Office of the Prime Minister are currently responsible for enforcing child labor provisions. Enforcement is weak because there is no comprehensive government policy on child labor and there are no established mechanisms for receiving, investigating, and addressing child labor complaints.<sup>3988</sup>

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

In 2004, the Cabinet created the National Steering Committee on the Prevention and Elimination of Child Labor. The Committee is responsible for developing a comprehensive National Policy to eliminate all forms of child labor, including the designing of a plan of action, reviewing and recommending legislation, implementing government programs and improving inter-organizational coordination. An Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee for Children in Need of Special

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	9/3/2004	✓
Ratified Convention 182	4/23/2003	✓
ILO-IPEC Associated Member		✓
National Plan for Children		✓
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan		

<sup>3980</sup> Dunn, *The Situation of Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, 8.

<sup>3981</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 18. See also U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1526*.

<sup>3982</sup> Dunn, *The Situation of Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labor*, 18. See also U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1604*.

<sup>3983</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Trinidad and Tobago*, Section 6f.

<sup>3984</sup> Article 17 of the Criminal Code, as cited in The Protection Project, "Trinidad and Tobago," in *Human Rights Report on Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children: A Country-by-Country Report on a Contemporary Form of Slavery*, March 2002; available from <http://209.190.246.239/ver2/cr/tt.pdf>.

<sup>3985</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3986</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Trinidad and Tobago*, Section 6f.

<sup>3987</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1604*.

<sup>3988</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, email communication to USDOL official, May 24, 2005.

Protection, under the Social Development Ministry, is creating a system to monitor children in need of special protection, analyzing data, developing policy, and promoting cooperation between government ministries, NGOs, and the private sector.<sup>3989</sup> ILO-IPEC works with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to implement two regional projects to combat the worst forms of children labor.<sup>3990</sup>

The Ministry of Education (MOE) is piloting a School Support Services Program in 2004 to offer counseling, homework assistance, and other support to high risk children. The MOE has also implemented a book loan/grant system for primary and secondary students.<sup>3991</sup>

Existing government child and youth programs also include the Adult Education Program, the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Program, and Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centers. Government programs focus mainly on providing at risk youth with short-term care, remedial education, and vocational training.<sup>3992</sup>

---

<sup>3989</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1526*.

<sup>3990</sup> The projects were funded by the Canadian government in 2002 and 2003. See ILO-IPEC - Geneva official, email communication to USDOL official, May 12, 2004.

<sup>3991</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, *unclassified telegram no. 1526*.

<sup>3992</sup> U.S. Embassy- Port of Spain, email communication. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports - 2003: Trinidad and Tobago*, Section 6d. See also ILO, *The Situation of Children in Landfill Sites and other Worst Forms of Child Labor: A Rapid Assessment*, December 2002.