

# Central African Republic

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

In 1998 the government, local NGOs and unions established a network to fight against the worst forms of child labor.<sup>482</sup> Other efforts have been hampered by the country's faltering economy, which was further exacerbated following a failed coup attempt in May 2001, forcing the government to slash its already small budget by one-third.<sup>483</sup>

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 63.5 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 14 in the Central African Republic were working.<sup>484</sup> Child labor is widespread, especially in rural areas, and some children work long hours at young ages.<sup>485</sup> Children work in agriculture, mining, domestic services, cattle raising, and street vending.<sup>486</sup> Some girls reportedly engage in prostitution.<sup>487</sup>

Public education is free, and education is compulsory from ages 6 to 14.<sup>488</sup> AIDS-related deaths have taken a heavy toll on teachers, contributing to the closure of more than 100 primary schools between 1996 and 1998.<sup>489</sup> In 1991, the gross primary enrollment rate was 56.9 percent.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>482</sup> U.S. Embassy— Bangui, unclassified telegram no. 783, October 2001 [hereinafter unclassified telegram 783].

<sup>483</sup> "Budget Slashed by One-Third Due to Coup Attempt," UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, September 28, 2001, on the allAfrica.com Web site at <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200109300013.html> on 11/5/01.

<sup>484</sup> "Enquete a Indicateurs Multiples en Republique Centrafricaine, Rapport Préliminaire," Bangui, 30 Décembre 2000, UNICEF, Ministère de l'économie, du Plan et de la Coopération Internationale, Division Des Statistiques et Des Etudes Economiques, Bureau Central du Recensement [hereinafter "Enquete a Indicateurs Multiples"], 31.

<sup>485</sup> Central African Republic, *Reports to Treaty Bodies: Committee on the Rights of the Child*, from For the Record 2000: the UN Human Rights System, at <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord2000/vol2/cartb.htm> on 11/5/01. See also *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Central African Republic* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2001) [hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6d, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/index.cfm?docid=731>.

<sup>486</sup> Unclassified telegram 783.

<sup>487</sup> The presence of international peacekeeping forces perpetuated the prostitution trade in the Central African Republic, as the peacekeepers served as a large group of clients. The practice of children engaging in prostitution has declined since late 1999, when international peacekeeping forces departed the country and the demand for prostitutes declined. See *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

<sup>488</sup> *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

<sup>489</sup> "CAR: HIV/AIDS Leading Cause of Death for Teachers," UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa, IRIN News Briefs, September 5, 2001, at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/>.

<sup>490</sup> *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [CD-ROM].

In 2000, the net primary enrollment rate for children between the ages of 6 and 11 was 43 percent.<sup>491</sup> Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for the Central African Republic. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.<sup>492</sup> The educational system's meager budget and salary arrears have resulted in a shortage of teachers and an increase in the number of street children.<sup>493</sup> The percentage of the national budget allocated to education, which traditionally stood at less than 12 percent, increased to 18 percent in the late 1990s. According to the government, it will further increase to 25 percent by 2010.<sup>494</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14, with the exception that children who are at least 12 may engage in light work in traditional agricultural activities or domestic work.<sup>495</sup> Children under 18 are forbidden to perform hazardous work or to work at night.<sup>496</sup> The Labor Code prohibits all forced labor.<sup>497</sup> Enforcement of the labor laws is poor due to a lack of sufficient resources by the government.<sup>498</sup> The Central African Republic ratified ILO Convention 138 and ILO Convention 182 on June 28, 2000.<sup>499</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> "Enquete a Indicateurs Multiples" at 10.

<sup>492</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see *Introduction* to this report.

<sup>493</sup> *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5

<sup>494</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 657th Meeting: Central African Republic*, CRC/C/SR.657 (Geneva, September 28, 2000).

<sup>495</sup> Unclassified telegram 783.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>497</sup> *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6c.

<sup>498</sup> It was reported in October 2001 that government employees had not been paid for approximately eight months. Unclassified telegram 783.

<sup>499</sup> ILOLEX database: <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/iloquery.htm> on 12/19/01.