

Gabon

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

In 2000, Gabon and eight other African countries began working with the ILO-IPEC on a project on combating the trafficking of children in West and Central Africa, funded by the USDOL.⁹⁸⁵ The government hosted a regional conference on trafficking in February 2001, created an inter-ministerial committee to work with UNICEF and the ILO to address the issue, and designated focal points in each ministry with relevant responsibilities.⁹⁸⁶ Gabon is also considering amending its national legislation to deal directly with trafficking, and is developing a plan to rehabilitate victims of trafficking.⁹⁸⁷ In November 2001, Gabon, UNICEF and several nongovernmental organizations announced a campaign to increase awareness about child labor and child trafficking.⁹⁸⁸

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 1999, the ILO estimated that 14.9 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in Gabon were working.⁹⁸⁹ Children work on commercial farms, in marketplaces, as street vendors, child beggars, domestic workers, and in prostitution.⁹⁹⁰ Children are trafficked into the country from Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation.⁹⁹¹

⁹⁸⁵ ILO-IPEC, *Combating the Trafficking of Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa (Phase II), Executive Summary* (Geneva).

⁹⁸⁶ *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Gabon* (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=793>.

⁹⁸⁷ “UNICEF and Partners Against Child Trafficking,” UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, November 8, 2001 [hereinafter “UNICEF and Partners”], in allAfrica.com, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200111080486.html> on 12/5/01.

⁹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸⁹ *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [hereinafter *World Development Indicators 2001*]. See also *Country Reports 2000; Lutte Contre le Trafic des Engants a des fins d'exploitation du Travail*, Synthese du 29 Janvier 2001, Ministre du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Formation Professionnelle, Republique Gabonaise [hereinafter *Lutte Contre le Trafic des Engants*]; and International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, *Report for the World Trade Organization General Council Review of Trade Policies of Gabon* (Geneva, June 2001) [hereinafter *Review of Trade Policies of Gabon*].

⁹⁹⁰ U.S. Embassy— Libreville, unclassified telegram no. 1540, November 2001 [hereinafter unclassified telegram 1540]. See also *Lutte Contre le Trafic des Engants*; “UNICEF and Partners”; and “Robbed of Youth and Lost to a Bondage Hell,” *The Age* (Australia), April 17, 2001 [hereinafter “Robbed of Youth”], at <http://www.theage.com.au/news/2001/04/17/FFX9WJX3LLC.html> on 12/5/01.

⁹⁹¹ “UNICEF and Partners.” See also “Robbed of Youth” and “Descent into Lives of Silent Servitude,” *Sydney Morning Herald* [Australia], June 6, 2001.

Education is compulsory and free until age 16, but parents must pay for expenses such as books and school supplies.⁹⁹² In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 132 percent and the net primary enrollment rate was 82.6 percent.⁹⁹³ According to the government, over 60 percent of students drop out before they complete the last year of primary school.⁹⁹⁴ Problems in the education system include poor management, planning and oversight, a shortage of teaching material, poorly qualified teachers and overcrowded classes.⁹⁹⁵ Gabon allocates nearly one tenth of the annual state budget to national education.⁹⁹⁶

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code prohibits children below the age of 16 from working without the express consent of the Ministries of Labor, Education, and Public Health.⁹⁹⁷ Children between 16 years and 18 years of age are prohibited from working in industries that necessitate continuous work hours, such as iron, sugar and paper factories. Children under 18 years are prohibited from working at night, except in family enterprises.⁹⁹⁸ No laws specifically prohibit trafficking, but traffickers can be prosecuted under laws that prohibit exploitation, abandonment, and mistreatment of women.⁹⁹⁹

While the Labor Code is intended to cover all children, in practice it is enforced only in situations involving Gabonese, not foreign born, children.¹⁰⁰⁰ Gabon has 35 labor investigators but none are explicitly tasked with investigating violations of the child labor laws.¹⁰⁰¹ In practice, the government has neither investigated nor prosecuted cases of trafficking.¹⁰⁰² Gabon has not ratified ILO Convention 138, but ratified ILO Convention 182 on March 28, 2001.¹⁰⁰³

⁹⁹² *Country Reports 2000* at Section 5.

⁹⁹³ UNESCO, *Education For All (EFA) 2000 Assessment*, (Paris, 2000) [CD-ROM].

⁹⁹⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention, Initial Reports of States Parties Due in 1996, Addendum, Gabon CRC/C/41/Add. 10* (June 21, 2000) [hereinafter *Initial Reports of States Parties*], paras. 214, 218.

⁹⁹⁵ In Libreville, classes average over 100 students in size, and rural area classes average about 40 students. Many rural schools are poorly built and lack furniture and educational material. Sixteen percent of school children have only one teacher for all six primary years, and some schools have no teacher at all. See *Initial Reports of States Parties* at para. 217/8.

⁹⁹⁶ *Initial Reports of States Parties* at para. 213, p. 42.

⁹⁹⁷ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁹⁹⁸ Unclassified telegram 1540.

⁹⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report for 2001: Gabon* (Washington, D.C., 2001) [hereinafter *Trafficking in Persons Report*], at <http://www.state.gov/g/inl/rls/tiprpt/2001/>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6c.

¹⁰⁰¹ U.S. Embassy—Libreville, unclassified telegram no. 1365, July 2000.

¹⁰⁰² *Trafficking in Persons Report*.

¹⁰⁰³ ILO, Table of Ratifications of Fundamental ILO Conventions, at http://www.ilo.org/public/french/standards/norm/sources/rats_pri.htm.

NOTE: Hard copies of all Web citations are on file.