

Central African Republic

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

In 1998, the Government of the Central African Republic, local NGOs and unions established a network to fight against the worst forms of child labor.⁷¹⁸ Two years later, in 2000, the government launched a study on child labor. Although the report has not been finalized, initial findings indicate a need for training for government employees involved in the investigating and monitoring of child labor.⁷¹⁹

In 2000, the government created a commission to study the magnitude of the trafficking in persons problem, locate those involved, and develop a plan to deal with the issue. The Ministries of Social Affairs, Interior, Labor, Rural Development, Justice, and Defense are represented on the commission; however, insufficient resources have limited the commission's effectiveness.⁷²⁰ On August 10-19, 2001, the government organized a one-week sensitization campaign on the problem of sexual exploitation in preparation for the U.N. World Child Summit.⁷²¹ In July 2002, the Central African Republic government ratified the African Union Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child. By September 19, 2002, the government, with assistance from UNICEF, initiated a nationwide implementation campaign to set up local committees around the country charged with monitoring and enforcing children's rights in every district.⁷²²

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 2010.⁷²³ A community schools pilot program, assisted by UNICEF, has been established to facilitate the education of young girls outside of the traditional school system. The program is currently in the process of expanding due to its success.⁷²⁴

⁷¹⁸ U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 783*, October 2001.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷²⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Central African Republic*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 119-21, Section 6f [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8301.htm>.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, 117-19, Section 5.

⁷²² U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 885*, October 2, 2002.

⁷²³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 657th Meeting: Central African Republic*, CRC/C/SR.657, United Nations, October 2000.

⁷²⁴ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 658th Meeting: Central African Republic*, CRC/C/SR.658, February 2001.

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 63.5 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years in the Central African Republic were working.⁷²⁵ Children reportedly work throughout the country, especially in rural areas, and some children work long hours at young ages.⁷²⁶ Children work in agriculture, mining, domestic services, cattle raising, and street vending.⁷²⁷ According to reports from an international agency, children also work alongside their families in the diamond fields.⁷²⁸ There have also been reports of young girls engaged in prostitution, sometimes by force. The number of children involved in this type of work has reportedly declined since 1999.⁷²⁹

Trafficking in children also occurs both to the Central African Republic and within the country. Children are brought from Nigeria, Sudan, and Chad to work as domestic servants, shop assistants, and field workers. Merchants, herders and others doing work in the region also traffick children into the country. These children are usually not related to their caretakers nor do they receive payment for their work. Most are not enrolled in school.⁷³⁰ There are concerns that refugee children have been forced to beg for food and money in the streets.⁷³¹

Education is compulsory from ages 6 to 14.⁷³² However, students must pay for their own books, supplies, transportation costs and insurance.⁷³³ In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 57.4 percent. The net primary enrollment rate was 53.4 percent.⁷³⁴ In 2000, the net primary attendance rate was 38.3 percent (53.5 percent in urban areas as opposed to 33.5 percent in rural

⁷²⁵ Children who are working in some capacity include children who have performed any paid or unpaid work for someone who is not a member of the household, who have performed more than four hours of housekeeping chores in the household, or who have performed other family work. Government of the Central African Republic, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS): Central African Republic*, UNICEF, Bangui, December 2000, 31.

⁷²⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Central African Republic: Reports to Treaty Bodies," in *For the Record 2000: The United Nations Human Rights System* United Nations, 2000, [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord2000/vol2/cartb.htm>. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 119-21, Section 6d.

⁷²⁷ U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 2572*, October 2001.

⁷²⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 119-21, Section 6d.

⁷²⁹ There are reports that the presence of international peacekeeping forces prior to 1999 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, although some girls continue to enter into prostitution to earn money for their families. See *Ibid.*, 119-21, Section 6c.

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-21, Section 6f. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "IRIN Focus on Child Trafficking in West and Central Africa", *allAfrica.com*, [online], February 29, 2000 [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200002290007.html>.

⁷³¹ UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Central African Republic*, CRC/C/15/Add.138, United Nations, October 2000, para 74.

⁷³² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 117-19, Section 5.

⁷³³ U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 783*.

⁷³⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

areas).⁷³⁵ In some rural areas, teachers and principals have been known to use their students as farm labor to earn money for school supplies and expenses.⁷³⁶ Also, the age at which a child begins school tends to be delayed in rural areas. Although boys and girls have relatively equal access to education at the primary level, the number of female students decreases once girls reach the ages of 14 to 15 due to pressure to marry.⁷³⁷ This discrepancy is more pronounced in the rural areas where girls are often kept at home to carry out domestic tasks and work in the fields.⁷³⁸ Despite increases in education spending, the educational system's budget remains small and unpaid salaries have resulted in a shortage of teachers and an increase in the number of street children.⁷³⁹ HIV/AIDS-related deaths have taken a heavy toll on teachers, contributing to the closure of more than 100 primary schools between 1996 and 1998.⁷⁴⁰

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years. However, children who are at least 12 years of age may engage in light work in some traditional agricultural activities or domestic work.⁷⁴¹ Children under 18 are forbidden to perform hazardous work or to work at night.⁷⁴² The Labor Code prohibits all forced labor.⁷⁴³ Enforcement of the labor laws is poor due to a lack of resources and insufficient labor inspection staff.⁷⁴⁴ In 2001, the number of trained inspectors totaled 72, but only 44 were working for the Ministry of Labor in some capacity. Ministry of Labor officials estimate 220 inspectors are needed in order to enforce labor laws properly.⁷⁴⁵

Although prostitution is legal in the Central African Republic, Article 198 of the Criminal Code prohibits publicly soliciting persons. Violations are punishable by a fine or imprisonment from 5 days to 1 month. Article 199 prohibits procurement of individuals for sexual purposes, including assisting in prostitution, and designates a fine and imprisonment for 3 months to 1 year for those found guilty. Article 200 increases the penalty of imprisonment from 1 to 5 years for cases

⁷³⁵ Government of the Central African Republic, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS): Central African Republic*, 10-11.

⁷³⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 117-21, Sections 5 and 6d. See also U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 783*.

⁷³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 117-19, Section 5.

⁷³⁸ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 657th Meeting*, para. 58.

⁷³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 117-19, Section 5. More than 3,000 street children between the ages of 5 and 18 live in Bangui. See U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 885*.

⁷⁴⁰ UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network for Central and Eastern Africa, *CAR: HIV/AIDS Leading Cause of Death for Teachers*, (IRIN News Briefs), ReliefWeb, [online] September 5, 2001 [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/s/9B5E64B3467718D3C1256AC3002F86FE>.

⁷⁴¹ U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 2572*. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 119-21, Section 6d.

⁷⁴² U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 783*.

⁷⁴³ The prohibition of forced or compulsory labor applies to children, although they are not mentioned specifically. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 119-21, Section 6c.

⁷⁴⁴ U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 783*.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

involving a minor.⁷⁴⁶ Minor's brigades have been established to punish persons responsible for forcing children into prostitution. However, few cases were prosecuted due to the victims' reluctance to press charges.⁷⁴⁷ Although the law does not specifically prohibit trafficking, traffickers can be prosecuted under anti-slavery laws, labor code violations, mandatory school age laws, and laws against prostitution.⁷⁴⁸ The government does not actively investigate trafficking cases.⁷⁴⁹

The Central African Republic ratified ILO Convention No. 138 and ILO Convention No. 182 on June 28, 2000.⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴⁶ Protection Project, "Central African Republic," in *Human Rights Report on Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children* Washington, D.C., March 2002, [cited September 13, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org>. See also Laura Lederer, *Central African Republic, A Human Rights Report on Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children*, The Protection Project, January 2001.

⁷⁴⁷ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 658th Meeting*, para. 28.

⁷⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Central African Republic*, 119-21, Section 6f.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited September 13, 2002]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>.