

# Gabon

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

Gabon is an associated country of ILO-IPEC.<sup>1436</sup> In 1999, the Government of Gabon and eight other African countries began working with ILO-IPEC on a USDOL-funded project to combat the trafficking of children in West and Central Africa.<sup>1437</sup> In September 2002, Gabon hosted a seminar on child trafficking during which government officials and representatives from NGOs and the EU agreed to coordinate efforts in the fight against child trafficking.<sup>1438</sup> Representatives from the Government of Gabon also attended a January 2002 seminar along with officials from Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, and several UN agencies and NGOs, to discuss child trafficking and exploitation in West and Central Africa.<sup>1439</sup> In the resulting declaration, the Yamoussoukro Declaration, the conference participants pledged to conduct coordinated information campaigns on child trafficking.<sup>1440</sup> In 2000, the Government of Gabon co-hosted a regional conference on trafficking as part of a collaborative effort with UNICEF and the ILO. The government also created an inter-ministerial committee comprised of representatives from the Ministries of Labor, Justice, Foreign Affairs, and Family to address the issue.<sup>1441</sup>

In June 2002, the U.S. State Department's Africa Bureau announced its West Africa Regional Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Persons, which includes Gabon. As part of this strategy, U.S. missions in the region will focus U.S. Government resources to support efforts by host governments to prosecute traffickers, protect and repatriate victims, and prevent new trafficking incidents. The strategy will be implemented through improved coordination among USG donors, greater

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<sup>1436</sup> ILO-IPEC, *IPEC Action Against Child Labour: Highlights 2002*, Geneva, October 2002.

<sup>1437</sup> ILO-IPEC, *Phase I: Combating the Trafficking of Children for Labour Exploitation in West and Central Africa*, executive summary, RAF/01/P53/USA, Geneva, July 1999.

<sup>1438</sup> UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, "More Effort Needed" On Child Trafficking, allAfrica.com, [online] September 17, 2002 [cited October 3, 2002]; available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/200209170799.html>.

<sup>1439</sup> Integrated Regional Information Networks, "West and Central Africa: IRIN Focus on Regional Efforts Against Child Trafficking", IRINnews.org, [online], January 21, 2002 [cited December 12, 2002]; available from [http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=19693&SelectRegion=West\\_Africa&SelectCountry=CENTRAL\\_AFRICA-WEST\\_AFRICA](http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=19693&SelectRegion=West_Africa&SelectCountry=CENTRAL_AFRICA-WEST_AFRICA).

<sup>1440</sup> Ibid. During a subsequent meeting on the issue in March 2002, the governments of West and Central Africa, including Gabon, and partner organizations agreed to ratify a regional convention against child trafficking in 2004. The convention will focus on prevention, identification, repatriation and reintegration of child victims of trafficking into their home countries. See Integrated Regional Information Networks, "West and Central Africa: Region to establish child trafficking legislation in 2004", IRINnews.org, [online], March 20, 2002 [cited September 6, 2002]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=26560>.

<sup>1441</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Gabon*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 286-88, Section 6f [cited September 6, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8374.htm>.

coordination with international donors, engagement with and funding of regional and international organizations, and direct funding for host government or local NGOs.<sup>1442</sup>

In March 2002, the Government of Gabon opened a center that provides shelter along with legal, medical and psychological assistance to trafficking victims.<sup>1443</sup> In November 2001, Gabon, UNICEF and several NGOs announced a campaign to increase awareness about child trafficking and inform victims about rehabilitative services.<sup>1444</sup> To assist with these efforts, the government provided free billboard space in major cities for an information campaign on trafficking.<sup>1445</sup> UNICEF is also planning to invest USD 15,000 in a joint government-UNICEF program that will help prepare rural Gabonese children for primary school.<sup>1446</sup>

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 14.1 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Gabon were working.<sup>1447</sup> Children are found working primarily as domestic servants and in the informal sector, which various studies indicate is controlled by foreigners.<sup>1448</sup> Children are trafficked into the country from Benin, Togo, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali for the purposes of labor and sexual exploitation.<sup>1449</sup> Children who are purchased in Benin, Togo and Mali for as little as USD 14 may be sold to commercial farms in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire for up to USD 340.<sup>1450</sup>

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<sup>1442</sup> U.S. Embassy- Abuja, *unclassified telegram no. 1809*, June 2002.

<sup>1443</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2002: Gabon*, Washington, D.C., June 5, 2002, 50 [cited August 29, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2002/10679.htm>.

<sup>1444</sup> UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, *UNICEF and Partners Against Child Trafficking*, allAfrica.com, [online] November 8, 2001 [cited February 25, 2002]; available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200111080486.html>.

<sup>1445</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Gabon*.

<sup>1446</sup> UN Wire, *Gabon: U.N. Committee Recommends More Resources for Child Rights*, United Nations Foundation, [online] January 18, 2002 [cited September 6, 2002]; available from [http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire/util/display\\_stories.asp?objid=23154](http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire/util/display_stories.asp?objid=23154).

<sup>1447</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

<sup>1448</sup> ILO, *The effective abolition of child labour*, 2001, 274 [cited December 12, 2002]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb280/pdf/gb-3-2-abol.pdf>. See also U.S. Embassy- Libreville, *unclassified telegram no. 1540*, November 2001.

<sup>1449</sup> UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, *UNICEF and Partners*. See also The Age, *Robbed of youth and lost to a bondage hell*, theage.com.au, [online] April 17, 2001 [cited December 11, 2001]; available from <http://www.theage.com.au/news/2001/04/17/FFX9WJX3LLC.html>. See also Ed O'Loughlin, "Descent into lives of silent servitude: Slavery in the 21st Century: a Herald Investigation," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, June 6, 2001, [cited December 5, 2001]; available from <http://old.smh.com.au/news/0106/06/features/features1.html>.

<sup>1450</sup> UN Wire, *Slave Trade: Ship Carrying 250 Children Forced to Return to Benin*, United Nations Foundation, [online] April 12, 2001 [cited September 6, 2002]; available from [http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire/util/display\\_stories.asp?objid=14230](http://www.unfoundation.org/unwire/util/display_stories.asp?objid=14230).

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16 under the Education Act.<sup>1451</sup> Schooling is free, but parents must pay for expenses such as books and school supplies.<sup>1452</sup> In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 154.1 percent,<sup>1453</sup> and the net primary enrollment rate was 82.6 percent.<sup>1454</sup> Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Gabon. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.<sup>1455</sup> According to the government, over 40 percent of students drop out before they complete the last year of primary school.<sup>1456</sup> Problems in the education system include poor management and planning, lapse oversight, a shortage of teaching material, poorly qualified teachers, overcrowded classes, and a curriculum that is not always relevant to students' needs.<sup>1457</sup> Gabon allocates nearly 10 percent of the annual state budget to national education.<sup>1458</sup>

## 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.<sup>1459</sup> Section 6 of the Labor Code prohibits employing children in jobs that are unsuitable for them due to their age, state or condition, or that prevent them from receiving compulsory education.<sup>1460</sup> Children between 16 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 in industrial establishments, except in family enterprises.<sup>1461</sup> Procurement of a minor for the

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<sup>1451</sup> United Nations, *Gabon Presents Initial Report to Committee on Rights of Child*, press release, January 17, 2002. See also UNESCO, *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1999, National education systems*, UNESCO, [online] [cited August 23, 2002]; available from [http://www.uis.unesco.org/statsen/statistics/yearbook/tables/Table3\\_1.html](http://www.uis.unesco.org/statsen/statistics/yearbook/tables/Table3_1.html).

<sup>1452</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Gabon*, 284-86, Section 5.

<sup>1453</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

<sup>1454</sup> UNESCO, *EFA 2000 Assessment: Gabon* [CD-ROM], Paris, 2000.

<sup>1455</sup> For a more detailed description on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

<sup>1456</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties due in 1996, Addendum: Gabon*, CRC/C/41/Add.10, prepared by Government of Gabon, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, July 13, 2001, para. 214.

<sup>1457</sup> In the capital city, Libreville, classes average 100 students in size, and rural 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 *Ibid.*, para. 217. See also United Nations, *Gabon Presents Initial Report to Committee on Rights of Child*.

<sup>1458</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties, Addendum: Gabon*, para. 213.

<sup>1459</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Gabon*, 286-88, Section 6d.

<sup>1460</sup> International Labour Office Governing Body, *Review of annual reports under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Part II: Compilation of annual reports by the International Labour Office*, GB.283/3/2, Geneva, March 2002, 344.

<sup>1461</sup> U.S. Embassy- Libreville, *unclassified telegram no. 1540*.

purposes of prostitution is punishable by imprisonment for two to five years and a fine of 100,000 to 2,000,000 CFA (USD 156 to 3,129).<sup>1462</sup>

No laws specifically prohibit trafficking in persons.<sup>1463</sup> However, in August 2001, the Council of Ministers of Gabon adopted a draft Ordinance that makes the trafficking of children punishable by a prison sentence and a fine of between 10 and 20 million CFA (USD 15,646 to 31,292).<sup>1464</sup> Pursuant to the Criminal Code, accomplices and instigators are subject to the same penalties as the prime offenders.<sup>1465</sup>

While the Labor Code is intended to cover all children, in practice it is enforced only in situations involving Gabonese children, and not those who are foreign-born.<sup>1466</sup> The Ministry of Justice is responsible for the enforcement of child labor laws, while the Ministry of Labor is charged with receiving, investigating and addressing child labor complaints.<sup>1467</sup> In 2000, Gabon was reported to have 35 labor investigators, none of whom were explicitly tasked with investigating violations of child labor laws.<sup>1468</sup>

The Government of Gabon has not ratified ILO Convention 138, but ratified ILO Convention 182 on March 28, 2001.<sup>1469</sup>

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<sup>1462</sup> Government of Gabon, *Criminal Code*, Article 261 [cited September 6, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org>. For currency conversion, see FX Converter, [online] [cited September 10, 2002]; available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

<sup>1463</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report: Gabon*, 50.

<sup>1464</sup> International Labour Office Governing Body, *Review of annual reports*, 342. FX Converter, at <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>. As of the end of 2001, the National Assembly was considering the proposed law. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Gabon*, 286-88, Section 6f.

<sup>1465</sup> International Labour Office Governing Body, *Review of annual reports*, 342.

<sup>1466</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Gabon*, 286-88, Section 6d.

<sup>1467</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1468</sup> U.S. Embassy- Libreville, *unclassified telegram no. 1365*, July 2000.

<sup>1469</sup> ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited September 6, 2002]; available from <http://iloex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.