

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

The Government of Guinea-Bissau has noted that child labor is harmful to the development of those involved, but states that it suffers from ineffective policies and lacks the resources or mechanisms to adequately address the problem.¹⁹⁸⁷ The government is receiving support from the ILO to incorporate child labor indicators into its poverty reduction strategy, and to revise the national labor code in order to strengthen laws protecting children.¹⁹⁸⁸ Small-scale child labor initiatives that focus on literacy, education alternatives, and technical training are being implemented by NGOs.¹⁹⁸⁹

The government is implementing a basic education project called “FIRKIDJA,” which is designed to improve both access to schools and the quality of education, promote girls’ schooling, and strengthen educational management.¹⁹⁹⁰ The World Bank is one of the organizations assisting the Ministry of Education to achieve these goals through a USD 14.3 million Basic Education Support loan project.¹⁹⁹¹ In addition, UNICEF is supporting the government with a program to promote female literacy and girls’ access to education in one targeted region of the country.¹⁹⁹²

According to 1998 estimates, over half of the country’s displaced population consisted of children under 18 years of age.¹⁹⁹³ The government is assisting these children with humanitarian services and World Food Program aid aimed at increasing school attendance, particularly among girls.¹⁹⁹⁴

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, UNICEF estimated that 65.4 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years in Guinea-Bissau were working.¹⁹⁹⁵ Children work in street trading, farming, and domestic labor.¹⁹⁹⁶ During the annual cashew harvest, children are withdrawn in part or completely from school in order to work in the fields.¹⁹⁹⁷ According to the government, the

¹⁹⁸⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial reports of States parties due in 1992, Guinea-Bissau*, CRC/C/3/Add.63, prepared by Government of Guinea-Bissau, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, July 26, 2001, para. 139-42.

¹⁹⁸⁸ U.S. Embassy- Dakar, *unclassified telegram no. 2129*, August 2003.

¹⁹⁸⁹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties*, para. 252.

¹⁹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 29-31.

¹⁹⁹¹ World Bank, *Basic Education Support Project, World Bank Project Data*, [cited June 19, 2003]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=104231&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P001015>.

¹⁹⁹² UNICEF, *Girls’ Education in Guinea Bissau*, [cited June 19, 2003]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/Bissaufinal.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties*, paras. 234, 39. The displacement was caused by internal conflict beginning in 1998 and lasting 11 months. WFP, *WFP-Assisted Projects, Guinea-Bissau*, 2003 [cited June 19, 2003]; available from http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/africa/guinea_bissau/projects_c.html.

¹⁹⁹⁴ WFP, *WFP-Assisted Projects*.

¹⁹⁹⁵ In the 2000 study, 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. It was estimated that 5.1 percent of children between ages 5 and 14 engage in paid work; 9.7 percent participate in unpaid work for someone other than a household member; and, overall, 65.4 percent of children are working in some capacity. See Government of Guinea-Bissau, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS): Guinea-Bissau*, UNICEF, December 2000; available from www.childinfo.org/MICS2/newreports/guineabissau/guineabissau.PDF. See also Government of Guinea-Bissau, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2: Guinea Bissau*, UNICEF, 2000; available from <http://www.ucw-project.org/resources/index.html>.

¹⁹⁹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Guinea-Bissau*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8385.htm>.

¹⁹⁹⁷ U.S. Embassy- Dakar, *unclassified telegram no. 2129*.

number of children working in the informal sector, often in difficult or dangerous conditions, is increasing considerably.¹⁹⁹⁸ In addition, commercial sexual exploitation of children occurs, but the extent of the problem is unknown.¹⁹⁹⁹ Children were reported to be involved in the recent civil war in Guinea-Bissau.²⁰⁰⁰

Education is compulsory from the age of 7 to 13 years.²⁰⁰¹ In 1999, the gross primary enrollment rate was 82.7 percent, with a higher enrollment rate for males (99.1 percent) compared to females (66.3 percent). In 1999, the net primary enrollment rate was 53.6 percent. Males had a higher net rate (62.6 percent) compared with females (44.5 percent).²⁰⁰² In 2003, the majority of school-age children were unable to receive schooling due to prolonged strikes in state-run schools.²⁰⁰³ The number of classrooms and schools is insufficient, particularly in rural areas where the majority of the population resides. According to UNICEF, 26 percent of rural schools offer only 2 grades, and 50 percent offer only 4 grades.²⁰⁰⁴ Girls face additional challenges to receiving an education, as they are often kept home to assist with domestic work, encouraged to marry at an early age,²⁰⁰⁵ and banned from schools when pregnant.²⁰⁰⁶

Guinea-Bissau is continuing to recover from the civil conflict in 1998 and 1999, which displaced one-third of the population, destroyed many schools, and prevented most young children from attending school for at least half a year.²⁰⁰⁷

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The General Labor Law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years for factory work and 18 years for heavy or dangerous labor, including work in mines.²⁰⁰⁸ The law prohibits forced or bonded labor.²⁰⁰⁹ The practice of prostitution for lucrative purposes is illegal in Guinea-Bissau, as is the use of violence, threats, or other coercive actions to transport individuals to foreign countries.²⁰¹⁰ In order to prevent trafficking, the law requires that individuals responsible for a child during travel submit identification documents (birth certificates) to relevant

¹⁹⁹⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties*, para. 250.

¹⁹⁹⁹ Prostitution among young people is reported to be reaching alarming proportions. See *Ibid.*, para. 253.

²⁰⁰⁰ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Child Soldiers 1379 Report*, November 2002, 38, [cited June 19, 2003]; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/cs/childsoldiers.nsf/Display%20Message/CSC%20Publications?OpenDocument>. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention: Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Guinea Bissau, CRC/C/15/Add.177*, Geneva, June 13, 2002, para. 48.

²⁰⁰¹ UNICEF, *Youth at the UN, Country Profiles on the Situation of Youth: Guinea-Bissau*, UNICEF, 2000 [cited June 19, 2003]; available from <http://esa.un.org/socdev/unyin/countrys.asp?countrycode=gw>.

²⁰⁰² World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003.

²⁰⁰³ U.S. Embassy- Dakar, *unclassified telegram no. 2129*.

²⁰⁰⁴ UNICEF, *Girls' Education in Guinea Bissau*.

²⁰⁰⁵ *Ibid.* See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties*, para 33.

²⁰⁰⁶ UNICEF, *Girls' Education in Guinea Bissau*.

²⁰⁰⁷ UNICEF, *UNICEF's Humanitarian Response to Children, January - December 1999, Guinea-Bissau*, UNICEF, 11, [cited June 19, 2003]; available from www.unicef.org/cap/gbissau.pdf.

²⁰⁰⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Guinea-Bissau*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18208pf.htm>.

²⁰⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Section 6c.

²⁰¹⁰ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties*, para. 259-61.

authorities.²⁰¹¹ According to Decree 20/83, boys under 16 years may volunteer for the armed forces, and all citizens between the ages of 18 and 25 are subject to compulsory military service.²⁰¹²

The Ministry of Justice and Labor is responsible for enforcing labor laws in the formal sector,²⁰¹³ but due to economic conditions, formal private sector employment of any kind is virtually nonexistent.²⁰¹⁴ There is no information available on the enforcement of laws pertaining to trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of children.

The Government of Guinea-Bissau has not ratified ILO Convention 138 or ILO Convention 182.²⁰¹⁵

²⁰¹¹ Ibid., para. 176.

²⁰¹² Ibid., para. 137.

²⁰¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2002: Guinea-Bissau*, Section 6d.

²⁰¹⁴ U.S. Embassy- Dakar, *unclassified telegram no. 3985*, December 2001.

²⁰¹⁵ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited June 19, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>.