

Central African Republic

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

UNICEF estimated that 63.5 percent of children ages 5 to 14 years in the Central African Republic were working in 2000.⁸⁸⁶ Although children work in many sectors of the economy, most children are engaged in agricultural work in rural areas.⁸⁸⁷ Some children work on farms at school.⁸⁸⁸ Children also reportedly work alongside adult relatives in diamond fields. In the capital of Bangui, street children are engaged in begging.⁸⁸⁹

Indigenous children, including pygmy children, are forced into agricultural, domestic and other forms of labor by other ethnic groups in the country.⁸⁹⁰

Reports indicate that children fought for both pro-government and rebel forces during the coup that occurred in March 2003.⁸⁹¹ The security situation in the country was generally stable during 2004, and there were no reports of children involved in armed conflict during the year.

Children in the Central African Republic are also involved in prostitution.⁸⁹²

Children are trafficked to the Central African Republic generally from Nigeria, Sudan and Chad for work in domestic service, small shops, and agriculture. Traveling merchants, herders, and other foreigners working in and transiting the country sometimes brought boys and girls with them. Such children did not attend school and were not paid for their work. There are some reports that children are trafficked from the country to Nigeria and other nearby nations for work in agriculture.⁸⁹³

⁸⁸⁶ 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 6 hours of housekeeping chores in the household, or who have performed other family work. See Government of the Central African Republic, *Enquête a Indicateurs Multiples en République Centrafricaine (MICS): Rapport Préliminaire*, UNICEF, Bangui, December 2000, 31; available from <http://www4.worldbank.org/afr/poverty/pdf/docnav/03307.pdf>.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.* See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Central African Republic*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27718.htm>.

⁸⁸⁸ This work is reportedly considered to prepare children for agricultural work as adults. The proceeds from the farms are used for school supplies and activities. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, Section 6d.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, Section 5, 6d.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Section 6c.

⁸⁹¹ In the weeks preceding the 2003 coup, for example, many street children were enrolled in security forces to repel the rebellion. Provided with only a few days of training, many of these children were killed in battle. See UN Commission on Civil and Political Rights, *List of issues prepared in the absence of the second periodic report of the State party, due on 9 April 1989*, Geneva, September 3, 2003, para. 17; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/880cc0a9e81c0a75c1256da90022b550?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/880cc0a9e81c0a75c1256da90022b550?Opendocument). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, Sections 1c and 5.

⁸⁹² UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 658th Meeting: Central African Republic*, CRC/C/SR.658, February 2001, para. 28; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/7c0595bc56c343b5c12569f500598d21?Opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/7c0595bc56c343b5c12569f500598d21?Opendocument). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, Section 6f.

⁸⁹³ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, Section 6f.

Despite the coup and suspension of the Constitution in 2003, certain laws prior to the coup remained in force in 2004.⁸⁹⁴ Education continued to be free and compulsory until age 14.⁸⁹⁵ However, children had to pay for their own books, supplies, and transportation.⁸⁹⁶ In addition, penalties were rarely applied for children's nonattendance.⁸⁹⁷ In 2001, the most recent year for which such data are available, the gross primary enrollment rate was 66.1 percent.⁸⁹⁸ Enrollment rates for boys were higher than for girls; in 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 79.4 percent for males, and 53.0 percent for females.⁸⁹⁹ Many reports indicate that male teachers from the primary to university levels pressure female students into sex in exchange for good grades.⁹⁰⁰ Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2000, the net primary attendance rate was 38.3 percent. The net primary attendance rate for children living in urban areas in 2000 was almost double the rate for children living in rural areas.⁹⁰¹ Chronic financial problems in the education system as well as the 2003 coup have led to the closure of many of the country's schools.⁹⁰² UNESCO reports that the student-teacher ratio in Central Africa Republic is more than 70 to 1.⁹⁰³

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., Introduction.

⁸⁹⁵ There is some confusion over the length of compulsory education in the country. The U.S. State Department reports that education is compulsory from age 6 to 14. An NGO report states that children may leave school at the minimum age of work, 14, but that girls' education is compulsory until the age of 21. This statement is based on government orders released prior to the 2003 coup. See Ibid., section 5. See also Angela Melchiorre, "Central African Republic," in *At What Age are school-children employed, married and taken to court?*, ed. Duncan Wilson Right to Education, 2004; available from <http://www.right-to-education.org/>. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial reports of States parties due in 1994: Central African Republic*, CRC/C/11/Add.18, prepared by Government of the Central African Republic, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, November 18, 1998, para. 187; available from [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/fb066e7732d518c0802567a6003b7aad?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/fb066e7732d518c0802567a6003b7aad?Opendocument).

⁸⁹⁶ U.S. Embassy- Bangui, *unclassified telegram no. 783*, October 3, 2001.

⁸⁹⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, section 5.

⁸⁹⁸ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid. Factors that limit girls' access to schooling include insufficient schools, pressure to marry, and tradition. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "UNICEF Funding Schools Construction in the Southwest", IRINnews.org, [online], January 30, 2003 [cited May 7, 2004]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=32015>.

⁹⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, section 5.

⁹⁰¹ Government of the Central African Republic, *Enquête a Indicateurs Multiples en République Centrafricaine*, 10-11.

⁹⁰² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, Section 5. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Teachers, Pupils to be Transported to Schools, Minister Says", IRINnews.org, [online], May 13, 2003 [cited May 7, 2004]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=34057>. HIV/AIDS-related deaths among teachers have also been a contributing factor to school closures. See Integrated Regional Information Networks, "HIV/AIDS leading cause of death for teachers", IRINnews.org, September 5, 2001 [cited May 7, 2004]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=11236>.

⁹⁰³ UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4: Gender and Education for All, The Leap to Equality*, 2003, chapter 2, 97; available from http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23023&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

Article 125 of the Labor Code, which remained in force during 2004, sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years. However, children who are at least 12 years of age may engage in light work.⁹⁰⁴ Children under 18 years are forbidden to perform certain kinds of work, including work in mines and work that involves carrying heavy loads, or work at night between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m.⁹⁰⁵ Forced labor was prohibited under the former Constitution; at the date of this writing it was unclear whether this provision is included in the new Constitution approved by referendum in December 2004.⁹⁰⁶ The minimum age for enlistment into the armed forces is 18.⁹⁰⁷

The Penal Code prohibits procurement of individuals for sexual purposes, including assisting in or profiting from prostitution, with penalties that include imprisonment for 3 months to 1 year and a fine of 100,000 to 1,000,000 francs (USD 177 to 1,778). Those found guilty of engaging in such acts with minors, which the code defines as persons less than 15 years of age, face penalties of imprisonment from 1 to 5 years and a fine of 200,000 to 2,000,000 francs (USD 354 to 3,556). The Penal Code also establishes penalties including imprisonment from 2 to 5 years and 100,000 to 800,000 francs (USD 177 to 1,422) if a school official commits an offense against the decency of a female student.⁹⁰⁸ The law does not specifically prohibit trafficking. However, traffickers can be prosecuted under anti-slavery laws, mandatory school age laws, the prostitution provisions of the Penal Code, and the Labor Code.⁹⁰⁹ In addition, Article 212 of the Penal Code establishes a penalty of imprisonment from 5 to 10 years for any person who abducts or causes the abduction of a child younger than 15 years of age.⁹¹⁰

⁹⁰⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial reports of States parties due in 1994*, para 62. See also NATLEX, *Central African Republic: Elimination of child labour, protection of children and young persons*, in NATLEX, [database online] [cited May 11, 2004]; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=CAF&p_classification=04&p_origin=COUNTRY. Children may work in traditional agriculture or home services starting at age 12. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports-2003: Central African Republic*, section 6d. See also U.S. Embassy- Bangui official, email communication to USDOL official, January 27, 2005.

⁹⁰⁵ NATLEX, *Central African Republic: Elimination of child labour*. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial reports of States parties due in 1994*, para. 62.

⁹⁰⁶ See Integrated Regional Information Networks, "New Constitution Adopted, 15 to Vie for Presidency", IRINnews.org, [online], December 20, 2004 [cited December 29, 2004]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=44736>.

⁹⁰⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial reports of States parties due in 1994*, para 61.

⁹⁰⁸ This section of the Penal Code was amended in 1964. See Government of the Central African Republic, *Penal Code*, (May 20, 1998), articles 196-201; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/CENTRALAFRICANREPUBLIC.pdf>. For currency conversion, see *OANDA Customizable Currency Converter*, oanda.com, [online] [cited September 1, 2004]; available from <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic>. The ILO's Committee of Experts has raised questions about what provisions in the country's law protect children under 18 from prostitution. See CEACR, *Direct request, Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182) Central African Republic (ratification: 2000)*, ILO, Geneva, 2003; available from <http://webfusion.ilo.org>.

⁹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, section 6f.

⁹¹⁰ CEACR, *Direct request*.

Labor inspectors with the Ministry of Labor and Civil Service, labor tribunals, the Attorney General, and the police are responsible for enforcing child labor laws,⁹¹¹ but the U.S. Department of State reported that enforcement occurs infrequently.⁹¹² Minor's brigades have been established to punish persons responsible for forcing children into prostitution. However, few cases have been prosecuted due to the reluctance of victims' families to press charges.⁹¹³ The government does not investigate trafficking cases.⁹¹⁴

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

With support from UNICEF, the Government of the Central African Republic made efforts in 2004 to implement an action plan to provide care to AIDS orphans, who are often compelled to begin working at an early age.⁹¹⁵ The government has also established a plan to combat trafficking, but there is no information available to assess the current status of the plan.⁹¹⁶

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified Convention 138	6/28/2000	✓
Ratified Convention 182	6/28/2000	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		
National Plan for Children		
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan (Trafficking)		✓

In August, the World Bank and IMF approved a package of aid programs for the country, which reportedly includes financing for education, including salaries for teachers.⁹¹⁷ UNICEF continued to provide support to a non-formal community schools program that is intended to promote girls' education.⁹¹⁸ UNICEF and WFP are working to provide access to water, sanitation, and school meals in the country's education system.⁹¹⁹ The new government endorsed the

⁹¹¹ Minister of Public Administration, Employment, and Civil Service, *Rapport*, Official submission under Article 22 of Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, August 30, 2002. See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports-2003: Central African Republic*, Section 6d.

⁹¹² The Government also reportedly lacks the resources to enforce prohibitions on forced child labor. See U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, section 6d.

⁹¹³ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 658th Meeting*, para 28.

⁹¹⁴ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, section 6f.

⁹¹⁵ UNICEF, *At a Glance: Central African Republic*, [online] [cited May 11, 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/car.html>. For a discussion of HIV/AIDS and its relationships to child labor, see Bill Rau, *HIV/AIDS and Child Labour: A State of the Art Review with Recommendations for Action, Synthesis Report*, Paper No. 6, ILO-IPEC, 2003; available from http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/publ/download/hiv6_subshara_en.pdf.

⁹¹⁶ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Central African Republic*, Section 6f. In 1993, the government established a national plan of action for the protection of children. It is unclear whether this plan is still active, as a 2003 report indicates that the government was formulating a new plan. See CEACR, *Direct request*.

⁹¹⁷ World Bank, *Central African Republic*, [online] 2004 [cited September 2, 2004]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/CENTRALAFREXTN/0,,menuPK:350005~pagePK:141159~piPK:141110~theSitePK:349999,00.html>. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Government gets post-conflict aid of US \$8.5 million", July 27, 2004 [cited September 2, 2004]; available from http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=42393&SelectRegion=Great_Lakes&SelectCountry=CENTRAL_AFRICAN_REPUBLIC.

⁹¹⁸ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Summary Record of the 658th Meeting*, para. 31. See also UNICEF, *At a Glance: Central African Republic*.

⁹¹⁹ UNICEF, *At a Glance: Central African Republic*. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "WFP in Awareness Raising Campaign for School Feeding Programme", IRINnews.org, [online], January 29, 2004 [cited May 11, 2004]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=39197>.

country's National Plan of Action for Education for All in April 2004, which runs until 2015 and is intended to achieve the following goals: protection and education of pre-school-aged children; universal basic education; the availability of relevant training for youth and adults; increased literacy; a reduction in the disparity between boys and girls' participation in education; improved educational quality; and widespread citizen education on HIV/AIDS.⁹²⁰

⁹²⁰ Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, *Plan National d'Action de l'Education Pour Tous 2003-2015: République Centrafricaine*, Bangui, July 21, 2003, 35-52; available from http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=20942&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html. See also Integrated Regional Information Networks, "National Education Plan Endorsed", IRINnews.org, [online], April 26, 2004 [cited May 11, 2004]; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/print.asp?ReportID=40758>.