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In 2020, Mauritius made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the reporting period, the National Assembly passed the long-awaited Children's Bill, which includes more robust provisions related to child prostitution and child pornography violations. Also passed was the Children's Court Bill, which sets out to ensure a child-friendly environment during court proceedings and establishes a Criminal Division with jurisdiction over sexual offences against children. In addition, the National Assembly voted to approve the Child Sex Offender Register Bill, which establishes the Child Sex Offender Register that will assist in monitoring, tracking, and investigating sexual offences against children. However, children in Mauritius are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in illicit activities. Children also



engage in child labor in construction and street work. In addition, existing prohibitions related to forced labor do not meet international standards because forced labor is criminally prohibited only when it results from human trafficking. There are also many barriers to education access, especially for children with disabilities. In addition, gaps remain in the implementation of key policies and social programs related to child labor, including the worst forms of child labor.

I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Mauritius are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in illicit activities. (1-3) Children also engage in child labor in construction and street work. (1,3,4) Table I provides key indicators on children's work and education in Mauritius. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent	
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	Unavailable	
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	Unavailable	
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	Unavailable	
Primary Completion Rate (%)		98.5	

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (5) Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2021. (6)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, activities unknown (1,3)
	Fishing, including diving, and casting nets and traps (1,3)
Industry	Construction (3,7)
Services	Domestic work (1,7)
	Working in shops and restaurants (1,3)
	Street work, including vending, begging, carrying goods in public markets, and in the transportation sector (1,3,8,9)
Categorical Worst	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,3)
Forms of Child Labor‡	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (1,3)

[‡] Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor per se under Article 3(a)-(c) of ILO C. 182.

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Research indicates there is an increase in child labor activities during the holiday season (November and December) and during breaks in the school year. (I) Some children in Mauritius are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation by their peers or family members, or through fraudulent offers of other employment. (1,10) Mauritius has never conducted a national child labor survey; accordingly, information on the prevalence of child labor in the country is limited. (11,12) Child labor is known to occur primarily in the informal sector, in which monitoring and enforcement are more challenging. (I)

Research indicates there were more cases of working children during the reporting period due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown from mid-March 2020 until June 2020. Some children stopped attending school during the lockdown because they were unable to participate in distance education programs, in all likelihood for want of Internet access; as a result, they took small manual jobs. (3) In addition, children with disabilities face significant barriers to education due to discrimination and a lack of special services and resources. (13,14)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Mauritius has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

	Convention	Ratification
KATOTEN	ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
A TOTAL	ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	UN CRC	✓
	UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	√

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Mauritius's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the prohibition of forced labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 2 and 8 of the Workers' Rights Act (15)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 2 and 9 of the Workers' Rights Act (15)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 8 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (16)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Article 6 of the Constitution; Article 2 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act (17,18)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 13A of the Child Protection Act; Articles 2, 11, 14, and 21 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act (18,19)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 14 of the Child Protection Act; Article 253 of the Criminal Code; Article 11 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act (4,18-20)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 30.1b-e, 38a, 41. If, and 41.2 of the Dangerous Drugs Act (21)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		

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Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (Cont.)

	•		
Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*†		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		Article 63 of the Criminal Code (20)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 37.2 of the Education Act (22)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 35 of the Education Act (22)

^{*} No conscription

Workers' Rights Act specifies that a child under the age of 16 may not be employed to work in any occupation, but allows for children to do light jobs in family businesses that are not harmful to their health, development, or education, however, the law does not limit the number of hours for light work. (15)

In December 2020, the National Assembly passed three bills aimed at reinforcing the legal framework on the protection of children. (3) The long-awaited Children's Bill will replace the Child Protection Act with a more comprehensive and modern legislative framework. The Children's Bill aims to address the limitations of the Child Protection Act by aligning with international standards on children's rights and includes more robust provisions addressing the offences of child prostitution and child pornography than the current Child Protection Act. (23) The second bill is the Children's Court Bill, which aims to establish a dedicated court that provides a child-friendly environment in the best interest of the child during court proceedings, and establishes a Criminal Division with jurisdiction over sexual offenses against children. (24) The Child Sex Offender Register Bill, which seeks to reduce the risk of sexual offenses against children by establishing a Child Sex Offender Register (CSO Register) that will assist in monitoring, tracking, and investigating sexual offenses against children. (25) These bills had not yet entered into force by the end of the reporting period. (3)

Existing prohibitions related to forced labor do not meet international standards because forced labor is criminally prohibited only when it results from human trafficking.

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the authority of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor, Human Resource Development and Training (MOLHRDT)	Enforces all labor laws, including those related to child labor. (13,26,27)
Office of the Ombudsperson for Children	Investigates any suspected or reported cases of child labor or violation of a child's rights, proposes laws and policies to advance children's rights, and implements trainings on child protection laws and prevention. (28,29)
Police Brigade for the Protection of Minors (Minors' Brigade)	Investigates crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, use of children in illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation. (3,30)Maintains a database of all human trafficking incidents involving children and refers all cases of commercial sexual exploitation to the Child Development Unit. (31)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions	Undertakes criminal proceedings on laws related to the worst forms of child labor in coordination with the Minors' Brigade and the judicial courts. (32,33)

The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children held several activities relating to children's welfare during the reporting period, including a 2-day networking forum on child protection in August. Other activities included

[†] No standing military

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media outreach to raise awareness of children's rights in April and May, and a meeting with NGOs on children living in poverty in July. (3) The Mauritius Police conducted 1,233 outreach sessions for primary and secondary schools and youth centers, reaching 80,989 people. These sessions were held with a view to informing the public about the dangers and consequences of the worst forms of child labor, child prostitution, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and trafficking in persons. (3,34) In addition, the Minors' Brigade participated in seven media programs dealing with the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (3) During the reporting period, bilateral meetings were carried out with the Supreme Court, the Police Department, and the High Powered and Working Together Committee. (3)

The Child Protection Act, Section 11, requires medical and paramedical professionals and school staff to report any cases of child labor or abuse. (19)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor, Human Resource Development and Training (MOLHRDT) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including authority to assess penalties.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,469,555†(1)	\$1,685,568‡ (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	129 (1)	114 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (15)	No (15)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	10,601 (27)	1,406 (34)
Number Conducted at Worksite	4,660 (1)	1,406 (34)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	4 (I)	0(3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	I (I)	I (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	l (l)	I (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Unknown (I)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (15)	Yes (15)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (I)	Yes (3)

[†] Data are from July 2019 to June 2020.

MOLHRDT held 27 training sessions for new recruits and 26 sessions for other officers during the reporting period. The ministry's Labor and Industrial Relations Division also received training on child labor regulations enumerated in the Workers' Rights Act. (3) This division is responsible for enforcing child labor law compliance and manages complaints, including those related to child labor, at 17 regional labor offices. (3) However, zero calls were reported to the hotline service related to child labor during the reporting period. Research indicated that the one child labor violation imposed and collected during the reporting period was from a 2019 case. (3)

Research found approximately 30 cases of working children, between the ages of 13 and 15, who were involved in jobs on construction sites, as street vendors, and in restaurants, shops, agricultural fields, and the transportation sector. (3) During the reporting period, MOLHRDT also reported it had conducted 1,406 inspections; however, it did not indicate if any were child-labor specific. In addition, due to the pandemic, significantly fewer inspections were conducted during the reporting period. (3,34) Although the government conducted labor inspections during the reporting period, it is unknown whether the government adequately

[‡] Data are from July 2020 to December 2020.

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verified whether children were found to be involved in child labor or hazardous work. (3) While the Workers' Rights Act permits unannounced inspections, MOLHRDT has previously reported that labor inspections are not carried out on private properties with small farms unless the farm is registered as a business; otherwise, labor inspectors are required to receive permission from the owner to conduct an inspection. (7,34)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the authority of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient resource allocation.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (I)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (I)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (1)	3 (3)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (1)	3 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (1)	0 (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (1)	I (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown (1)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (I)	Yes (3)

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare reported 10 cases (6 males and 4 females) of alleged child labor during the reporting period. Three of the cases involved commercial sexual exploitation, four cases were related to begging, and three cases were related to street vending and working in shops. (3)

During the reporting period, new employees of the Mauritius Police received initial training, which covered the worst forms of child labor. The Mauritius Police reported three new investigations into child labor and three violations; however, there were no child labor prosecutions. (3) There was one conviction in 2020 for the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. The accused was charged in 2014 under Section 14 of the Child Protection Act, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison. (3) The Court initially sentenced the accused to 18 months' imprisonment, but later reduced the sentence to 240 hours of community service. (3,34) While the Court has taken action against the accused, the penalties imposed were not commensurate with the crime. (3,34)

Reporting indicates that criminal law enforcement agencies continue to lack staff, transportation, and other resources to properly enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (1,3)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including lack of a coordinating body primarily focused on child labor.

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Child Development Unit	Enforces legislation related to children, implements policies and social programs related to child development, and provides social services to victims of the worst forms of child labor, including human trafficking. Also provides trainings and awareness campaigns against human trafficking, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and operates the 113 hotline for any offences involving children. (2,11,35) Managed by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (MOGE), the budget for child protection, welfare, and development was \$3 million for fiscal year 2020–2021, which mainly funded the Child Development Unit. (3)
High Powered and Working Together Committee	Chaired by MOGE, coordinates and implements activities on children's rights, including efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor. (1,3,35) Met in January 2020 to coordinate the various government agencies working on child protection. (3)

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Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor (Cont.)

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking	Comprises representatives from the Attorney General's Office, MOLHRDT, MOGE, and other ministries; however, it is not yet clear who will chair this committee. Coordinates anti-trafficking efforts in Mauritius. (3,36,37) Did not meet during the reporting period. (38)
National Steering Committee on Trafficking in Persons	Chaired by the Prime Minister's Office, drives daily operations on anti-trafficking efforts. Operates as a working-level technical committee under the auspices of the high-level Inter-Ministerial Committee. (3,10) Met twice during the reporting period. (38)
Community Child Watch Committee	Conducts surveillance of children exposed to any form of violence, including commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking, at the community levels. Operates with the collaboration of volunteers, social workers, NGOs, and other key stakeholders. (39) Held 282 meetings between January and October. (3)

Once the Children's Act goes into effect, the Child Services Coordinating Panel will be established and will be responsible for the coordination of all activities relating to the implementation of this new law, the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. (3,23)

The government's efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor were hindered by a lack of coordination, inter-agency communication, and information sharing between key coordinating mechanisms. In addition, there is no coordinating body whose primary focus is child labor. (1,3)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including covering all the worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Education and Human Resources Strategy Plan (2008–2020)	Aimed to provide equal access to primary, secondary, and technical and vocational education. Provided social services for youth. Overseen by the Ministry of Education. (40) Replaced by the Nine Year Continuous Basic Education Policy in January 2017. (38)
Nine Year Continuous Basic Education Policy (2017– 2030)	Aims to enable all students to successfully complete 9 years of basic schooling and forms part of a package of reforms designed to strategically transform the education system in Mauritius. Also referred to as Nine Year Schooling. (38,41)
National Sport and Physical Activity Policy (2018–2028)	Provides a structured sports program available to all ages. Focuses on children and young adults, offering after- school recreational activities to help reduce children's vulnerability to child labor and illicit activities. (7,42,43)

Although the Government of Mauritius has adopted the Nine-Year Continuous Basic Education Policy and the National Sport and Physical Activity Policy, research found no evidence of these policies aiming to combat the worst forms of child labor, such as commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, drafted in 2016, has yet to be adopted by the government. (1,36,38,44,45) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor in Mauritius during the reporting period.

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including implementation of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

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Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
National Children's Council†	Overseen by MOGE, offers a wide range of services and facilities, including day care, shelters, creativity centers, children's clubs, and school child protection clubs around the island. (1,46) Research was unable to determine whether the National Children's Council held any activities during the reporting period.
Eradication of Absolute Poverty Program†	Increases access to quality primary education for vulnerable children administered by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. Provides educational support to 7,500 households in 229 geographic pockets of poverty and in the Education Priority Zones. Designed to provide equal opportunities to primary school-aged children throughout the country. (47,48) Research was unable to determine whether this program was active during the reporting period.
Awareness-Raising Programs on Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking†	Educates the public on preventing commercial sexual exploitation of children and human trafficking, created by MOGE. (I) Between January 2020 and September 2020, MOGE held 23 outreach sessions, mainly geared to adolescents, teenage mothers, parents, caregivers, and shelter officers, on various topics reaching 1,275 people. An additional 24 sessions were held on subjects related to child abuse. (3)
Atelier Partage Parents Program	Aims to educate parents, covers good parenting practices, and focuses on violence and child abuse issues. (1,35,46) One session was held during the reporting period. (3)

[†] Program is funded by the Government of Mauritius.

Although the government has established the National Children's Council to improve the effectiveness of institutional care facilities and shelters, evidence suggests that there continues to be a lack of appropriate standards of care, inadequate provision of services, and overcrowding in some centers that house orphans, child victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and child victims of other types of abuses. (2,32,42,49,50)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Mauritius (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 into non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2020
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions limit the number of hours for light work.	2019 – 2020
	Ensure that all forms of forced labor are criminally prohibited.	2019 – 2020
Enforcement	Strengthen the labor inspectorate by authorizing inspectors to assess penalties.	2015 – 2020
	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted in all sectors in which children work, and assess penalties for child labor violations.	2020
	Allow labor inspectors to conduct unannounced inspections on private properties and throughout the informal sector.	2018 – 2020
	Increase the amount of training, human resources, and funding for agencies responsible for enforcing criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor.	2011 – 2020
	Ensure that penalties for the worst forms of child labor, including sexual abuse or exploitation of a child, are commensurate with those for other serious crimes.	2020
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure that coordination mechanisms to combat the worst forms of child labor share information and policy-making decisions, improve coordination, and prevent overlap.	2012 – 2020
	Ensure a coordinating body exists that comprehensively addresses child labor.	2019 – 2020
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2014 – 2020
	Adopt a comprehensive National Action Plan to combat human trafficking.	2017 – 2020
	Annually publish activities undertaken to implement key policies designed to address child labor.	2019 – 2020
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor in Mauritius to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2020
	Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education.	2014 – 2020

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Ensure that child victims of commercial sexual exploitation have access to comprehensive and quality social services and standards of care.	2010 – 2020
	Publish activities undertaken to implement the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Program during the reporting period.	2019 – 2020
	Conduct research to further identify children's activities in farming to inform policies and programs.	2020
	Publish activities undertaken by the National Children's Council during the reporting period.	2020

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