

In 2021, Mauritius made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare enacted the long-awaited Children's Act, which includes more robust provisions related to child prostitution and child pornography violations. The government also enacted the Children's Court Act, which sets out to ensure a child-friendly environment during court proceedings and establishes a Criminal Division with jurisdiction over sexual offenses against children. In addition, the government enacted the Child Sex Offender Register Act, which establishes the Child Sex Offender Register that will assist in monitoring, tracking, and investigating sexual offenses 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. There are many barriers to education access, including conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, that place children at greater risk of child labor. In addition, gaps remain in the implementation of key policies and social programs related to child labor, including the worst forms of child labor.

Agalega Islands, Cargados Carajos Shoals, and Rodrigues are not shown.



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. (1,2) Children also engage in child labor in construction and street work. (2) Table 1 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 (%)		96.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2021, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022. (3)
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2022. (4)

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, animal rearing (2,5)
	Fishing, including diving, and casting nets and traps (2,6)
Industry	Construction (2)
Services	Domestic work (2)
	Working in shops and restaurants (5-7)
	Street work, including vending, begging, carrying goods in public markets, and in the transportation sector (2,8,9)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (2)
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (2)

‡ 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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Some children in Mauritius are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation by their peers or family members, or through fraudulent offers of other employment. (1,7) There are reports that some children in Mauritius are sexually abused and exploited through online channels. (2,10) Mauritius has never conducted a national child labor survey; accordingly, information on the prevalence of child labor in the country is limited. (2,11,12)

During the reporting period, the COVID-19 pandemic created conditions that put children at more risk of child labor, including school closures in March, April, and November. (2,13,14) The Ministry of Education provided online and televised classes during school closures, but children from low-income households lacked the resources to keep up. (2,15) There are reports of an increase in child labor activities during school closures and the holiday season (November and December), including street work and other informal work. (2,7,16) In addition, children with disabilities faced significant barriers to education due to discrimination and a lack of special services and resources. (17,18)

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
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
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	✓

On July 1, 2021, the government ratified ILO C.190, which obligates each Member State to respect, promote, and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work, including the effective abolition of child labor. (19,20) The Convention entered into force for Mauritius on July 1, 2022. (21)

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 military recruitment of children by non-state armed groups.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Articles 2 and 8 of the Workers' Rights Act (22)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 2 and 9 of the Workers' Rights Act (22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 8 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2, 11, 14, and 21 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act; Article 6 of the Constitution (24,25)
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 (25,26)
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; Articles 19, 20, and 21 of the Children's Act (25-28)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 30.1b–e, 38a, 41.1f, and 41.2 of the Dangerous Drugs Act (29)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
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 (27)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 37.2 of the Education Act (30)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 35 of the Education Act (30)

* Country has no conscription (15)

† Country has no standing military (15)

In January 2022, the government enacted three laws aimed at reinforcing the legal framework on the protection of children. (2,31) The long-awaited Children's Act replaced the Child Protection Act with a more comprehensive and modern legislative framework. The Children's Act 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 offenses of child prostitution and child pornography than the Child Protection Act. (28) The second law is the Children's Court Act, 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. (32) The third law, the Child Sex Offender Register Act, seeks to reduce the risk of sexual offenses against children by establishing a Child Sex Offender Register that will assist in monitoring, tracking, and investigating sexual offenses against children. (33) The Ministry of Social Security is also currently drafting a Disability Bill, which aims to address different forms of discrimination based on disability and support inclusion for disabled persons. (34)

The Workers' Rights Act specifies that a child under age 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. (11,22)

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 operations 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. (2,18,35)
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. (10,36,37)
Police Brigade for the Protection of Minors (Family Protection Brigade)	Investigates crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, use of children in illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation. (2,5) Maintains a database of all human trafficking incidents involving children and refers all cases of commercial sexual exploitation to the Child Development Unit. (38)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions	Undertakes criminal proceedings on laws related to the worst forms of child labor in coordination with the Family Protection Brigade and the judicial courts. (2,39,40)

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The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children implemented multiple activities to advance children's well-being during the reporting period, including data collection and disseminating more than 60,000 brochures in June and July 2021 to sensitize the public against online commercial sexual exploitation. (2,10) The Family Protection Brigade conducted 250 awareness-raising sessions at primary and secondary schools, youth centers, and community organizations, reaching a total of 52,036 attendees. (34)

Section 34 of the Children's Act imposes a mandatory reporting obligation on persons performing professional or official duties with respect to children, including health care professionals, employees of childcare institutions, and social workers. Failure of these professionals to report cases in which a child has been or is likely to be exposed to harm makes them liable to a fine of up to \$4,500 and to imprisonment of up to 5 years. (28,41)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor, Human Resource Development and Training (MOLHRDT) that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including insufficient coverage in inspection planning.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,685,568† (5)	\$1,456,841‡ (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	114 (5)	109 (2)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	1,406 (42)	6,890 (41)
Number Conducted at Worksite	1,406 (42)	6,890 (41)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (5)	Unknown
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	1 (5)	1 (2)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	1 (5)	1 (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (22)	Yes (22)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (2)

† Data are from January 2020 to December 2020.

‡ Data are from January 2021 to December 2021.

In 2021, the MOLHRDT held 20 training sessions for new recruits and 50 sessions for other officers. The ministry's Labor and Industrial Relations Division also received training on child labor regulations enumerated in the Workers' Rights Act. (2) This division is responsible for enforcing child labor law compliance and manages complaints—including those related to child labor—at 17 regional labor offices. However, the hotline service operated by MOLHRDT did not receive any calls related to child labor during the reporting period. (2) Research indicates that the one child labor violation imposed with penalties collected during the reporting period was from a 2019 case. (2) The government did not provide information on the number of child labor violations found during the reporting period for inclusion in this report. (2)

Research found approximately 15 cases of children between the ages of 12 and 14, and 30 cases of children between the ages of 15 and 16, engaging in child labor activities on construction sites and in street vending, domestic work, animal rearing, agriculture, and the transportation sector. (2) NGOs noted that children were exposed to risk health hazards and accidents while working without personal protective equipment or

doing work not suitable for their age, including a 14-year-old who reportedly was burned while working for a mechanic. (2) No inspections were made during the pandemic confinement period from March 10 to April 30, and inspections remained lower than their pre-pandemic rates. The MOLHRDT reported that no children were removed from child labor due to labor inspections during the reporting period. (2) Although the government conducted labor inspections during the reporting period, it is unknown whether the government adequately verified whether children were found to be involved in child labor or hazardous work. (5) While the Workers' Rights Act permits unannounced inspections, the 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. (2,5,42,43)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including lack of training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (5)	Yes (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Number of Investigations	3 (5)	3 (2)
Number of Violations Found	3 (5)	16 (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (5)	0 (2)
Number of Convictions	1 (5)	2 (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (5)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (2)

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (MOGE) reported 23 cases (9 males and 14 females) of alleged child labor during the reporting period. Of these, 17 cases involved commercial sexual exploitation, 7 cases involved child trafficking, and 5 cases were related to begging. (2,41)

During the reporting period, new employees of the Mauritius Police received initial training, which covered the worst forms of child labor and the three new laws (the Children's Act, the Child Sex Offender Register, and the Children's Court Act). (2) The Cybercrime Unit opened an investigation in response to the online commercial sexual exploitation of minors, including one case on Rodrigues Island. (2,44) Two suspects were arrested and a third is under investigation. (45) The Mauritius Police reported 3 new investigations into child labor and 16 violations; however, there were no child labor prosecutions initiated. In February, a court sentenced a man to 4 years of prison time for child trafficking. (2) In October, a court sentenced the same man to 5 years in prison in relation to commercial sexual exploitation of children, to serve part of the sentence concurrently with his previous conviction for a total of 7 years of imprisonment. (2,34,41)

Research indicates that Mauritius Police lacked sufficient human resources, with many officers required to isolate due to COVID-19 symptoms. (46) Additionally, criminal law enforcement agencies continue to lack training, equipment, and technology to properly enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor, including capacity-building on child-sensitive interview techniques. (2)

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 the lack of a coordinating body primarily focused on child labor.

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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 survivors of the worst forms of child labor, including human trafficking. Also provides trainings and awareness campaigns on human trafficking, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and operates the 113 hotline for any offenses involving children. (2,47-49) Managed by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (MOGE), the budget for child protection, welfare, and development was \$3.9 million for fiscal year 2021–2022, which mainly funded the Child Development Unit. (2,5)
High Powered and Working Together Committee	Chaired by MOGE, coordinates and implements activities on children's rights, including efforts to address the worst forms of child labor. (2,5,7,12,49) Met once in 2021. (2)
Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking	Comprises representatives from the Attorney General's Office, MOLHRDT, MOGE, and other ministries. Chaired by the Attorney General's Office and coordinates anti-trafficking efforts in Mauritius. (2,5,34,50) Reactivated by the cabinet and met once in July 2021. (2)
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. (1,5) The National Steering Committee on Trafficking in Persons met regularly during the reporting period. (41,46)
Community Child Watch Committee	Conducts surveillance of children exposed to any form of violence, including commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking, at the community level. Operates with the collaboration of volunteers, social workers, NGOs, and other key stakeholders. Did not meet in 2021. (2)

The Children's Act that took effect in January 2022 provides for the creation of a Child Services Coordinating Panel, which will be responsible for the coordination of all activities relating to the implementation of this new law, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. (2,5,28) The Child Services Coordinating Panel was launched by MOGE in October 2021 and delivered training to its members in the same month. (2) In April 2021, MOGE established a Technical Committee to address child pornography. (34,44,51)

The government's efforts to address the worst forms of child labor were hindered by a lack of coordination, interagency communication, and information sharing between key coordinating mechanisms. In addition, there is no coordinating body whose primary focus is child labor. (2,5,7)

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 a lack of coverage of all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
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. (53,54)
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. (43,55)

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 address the worst forms of child labor, such as commercial sexual exploitation. In December 2021, the government and an international organization received a final draft of a National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, which was initially drafted in 2016 and has yet to be adopted by the government. (34,41,46,56) The government expects to complete the National Action Plan in 2022. (46) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor in Mauritius during the reporting period. (2)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, 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 adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

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. (7,57) Awareness-raising campaigns reached 1,659 primary school students and 145 secondary school students from January to November 2021. (34)
Eradication of Absolute Poverty Program†	Provides support to families living in absolute poverty through empowerment and income programs administered by the Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity. Activities include a monthly child allowance, provision of free school materials, examination fees support, medical screening, housing support, and counseling. (6) Research determined that this program was active during the reporting period. (34)
Awareness-Raising Programs on Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking†	Educate the public on preventing commercial sexual exploitation of children and human trafficking, created by MOGE. (2,7) Between January and September 2021, MOGE held 12 awareness campaigns led by the Child Development Unit and the Mauritius Family Welfare Planning Association for approximately 150 people. (2)
National Education Counseling Service†	Identifies truant children, conducts visits to vulnerable families, and refers suspected child labor cases to MOLHRDT. Also conducts community outreach and parental involvement programs. (2) Handles approximately 2,000 cases every year. Research determined that this program was active during the reporting period. (6)
Atelier Partage Parents Program	Aims to educate parents, covers good parenting practices, and focuses on violence and child abuse issues. (7,49) Carried out 6 meetings during the reporting period and reached 162 parents. (34)

† Program is funded by the Government of Mauritius.

The government has established the National Children's Council to improve the effectiveness of institutional care facilities and shelters. During the reporting period, MOGE provided training on child abuse and commercial sexual exploitation for staff working in residential care facilities, delivered psychological support and counseling for child residents, and offered facilities to attend online and in-person classes. (34) However, 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 survivors of commercial sexual exploitation, and child survivors of other types of abuses. (6) There are reports that pandemic movement restrictions created staffing shortages in shelters. (46) The decline in the number of awareness campaigns related to the worst forms of child labor is reportedly attributed to the pandemic. (2)

During the reporting period, the government reported progress in improving access to education for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Education undertook infrastructural work in primary and secondary schools to facilitate physical access to all classrooms, operated 6 dedicated Special Education Needs resource development centers, supported 83 centers privately run by NGOs, and refunded transport costs for 1 accompanying parent of children with disabilities attending schools and day care centers. (34)

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 – 2021
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions limit the number of hours for light work.	2019 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted in all sectors in which children work.	2020 – 2021
	Allow labor inspectors to conduct unannounced inspections on private properties and throughout the informal sector.	2018 – 2021
	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 – 2021

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2018 – 2021
	Ensure that coordination mechanisms to address the worst forms of child labor share information and policy-making decisions, improve coordination, and prevent overlap.	2012 – 2021
	Ensure that a coordinating body exists that comprehensively addresses child labor.	2019 – 2021
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2014 – 2021
	Adopt a comprehensive National Action Plan to address human trafficking.	2017 – 2021
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor and publish results from activities implemented during the reporting period	2019 – 2021
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor in Mauritius to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2021
	Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education.	2014 – 2021
	Ensure that child survivors of commercial sexual exploitation have access to comprehensive and quality social services and standards of care.	2010 – 2021
	Publish activities undertaken to implement the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Program during the reporting period.	2019 – 2021
	Conduct research to further identify children's activities in farming to inform policies and programs.	2020 – 2021
	Publish activities undertaken by the National Children's Council during the reporting period.	2020 – 2021

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