

In 2022, Mauritius made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. In January 2022, the government enacted three laws, the Children's Act 2020, the Children's Court Act 2020, and the Child Sex Offenders Register Act 2020, aimed at reinforcing the legal framework on the protection of children. The three laws intended to harmonize Mauritius' domestic laws with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The government also increased its number of labor inspectors from 109 in 2021 to 164 in 2022 and adopted a 2022–2026 national action plan to combat human trafficking, with support from the International Organization of Migration. However, some children in Mauritius are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and illicit activities, including selling drugs. Children also engage in child labor in construction and street vending. The government should consider

implementing policies and social programs to improve the standard of care and availability of housing for victims of child commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, the police are in need of sufficient human resources, training in child-sensitive interview techniques, and adequate procedural mechanisms for investigation of child labor crimes, such as those involving commercial sexual exploitation. 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

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, 2023. (1)
Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2021. (2)

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, including animal rearing (3,4)
	Fishing, including diving, and casting nets and traps (3-5)
Industry	Construction (3,4)
Services	Domestic work (3)
	Working in shops and restaurants (4-7)
	Street work, including vending, begging, and in the transportation sector (3,4,8)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,4)
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (3,4)

‡ 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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
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Reporting from 2022 showed that children from low-income families in Mauritius engaged in child labor activities on construction sites and in street vending, domestic work, animal rearing, agriculture, and the transportation and selling of goods. (3,4) Children were exposed to risks of health hazards and accidents while working without personal protective equipment, including drowning due to deep fishing, contracting sexually transmissible diseases and unwanted pregnancies, alcohol and drug addiction, and stymied physical and psychological development. (4) In addition, some children in Mauritius are subjected to commercial sexual exploitation by their peers or family members, or through fraudulent offers of other employment. (4,7,9) There are also reports that some children in Mauritius are sexually abused and exploited through online channels. (3,4,10,11) Because Mauritius has never conducted a national child labor survey, information on the prevalence of child labor in the country is limited. (3,12,13)

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. (14,15) The Convention entered into force for Mauritius on July 1, 2022. (16)

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 lack of prohibitions for 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 (17)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Articles 2 and 9 of the Workers' Rights Act (17)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 8 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (18)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 2, 11, 14, and 21 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act; Article 6 of the Constitution (19,20)
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 (20,21)
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 19–21 of the Children's Act (20-23)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 30.1b–e, 38a, 41.1f, and 41.2 of the Dangerous Drugs Act (24)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		

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 (22)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 37.2 of the Education Act (25)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 35 of the Education Act (25)

* Country has no conscription (26)

† Country has no standing military (26)

In January 2022, the government enacted three laws aimed at reinforcing the legal framework on the protection of children. (3,4,27) The three laws intended to bring Mauritius' domestic laws in line with the rights and obligations outlined in the UN CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. (23) The Children's Act, which replaced the Child Protection Act, aims to address the limitations of the Child Protection Act by aligning with international standards on children's rights. The Children's Act also criminalizes child abuse, including abandonment, corporal punishment, child pornography, child grooming, and bullying. (23) Further, the Children's Act protects children under the age of 16 who have been victims of child trafficking, forced labor, slavery, or child labor. (23) The second law is the Children's Court Act, which establishes a court exclusively for criminal and protection cases related to children, as outlined in the Children's Act 2020. (28) The Children's Court Act establishes a Protection Division with jurisdiction over issues affecting the welfare of children and a Criminal Division with jurisdiction over criminal offenses against children and crimes committed by children. (28) 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. (29)

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. (12,17)

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 & Activities
Ministry of Labor, Human Resource Development and Training	Enforces all labor laws, including those related to child labor. (3,30,31)
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. (10,32,33)
Police Brigade for the Protection of Minors (Family Protection Brigade) and Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions	Coordinate to investigate and prosecute crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking, use of children in illicit activities, and commercial sexual exploitation. (3,6) Maintain a database of all human trafficking incidents involving children and refers all cases of commercial sexual exploitation to the Child Development Unit (CDU). (34)

The Ministry of Gender reported 10 alleged cases of child labor, 35 alleged cases of child mendicity, and 3 alleged cases of child trafficking during the reporting period. However, non-government reports indicate that the actual number of child labor cases, including the worst forms of child labor, are significantly higher and rising. (4,35) In addition to existing agencies that protect children, the Mauritius Probation and Aftercare Service was established

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under the 2020 Children's Act and appointed to monitor and assess the sound physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, and social development of children in probation, detention, and post-detention circumstances. (4)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, labor law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to address child labor (Table 6). Notably, the government increased its funding for the Labor Inspectorate, which coincided with increases in the number of inspectors recruited and the frequency of inspections carried out. 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	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,456,841 (3)	\$2,347,852 (4)
Number of Labor Inspectors	130 (3,36)	164 (4)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (17)	Yes (17)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	6,890 (36)	7,024 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	2 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	1 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	1 (3)	0 (4)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (17)	Yes (17)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (4)

In 2022, the MOLHRDT held 27 training sessions for new recruits and 99 training 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. (3,4) 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 the MOLHRDT did not receive any calls related to child labor during the reporting period. (4) 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. (23,36)

The MOLHRDT reported that no children were removed from child labor due to labor inspections during the reporting period. (4) Although the government conducted labor inspections during the reporting period, it is unknown whether the government adequately verified if children were found to be involved in child labor or hazardous work. (4) 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. (3,6,37,38)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including a lack of training for criminal investigators.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	3 (3)	3 (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	0 (3)	0 (4)
Number of Convictions	2 (3)	0 (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (3)	N/A (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (4)

In 2022, 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 Act, and the Children's Court Act). (3,4) The Ministry of Gender reported on three alleged cases of child trafficking during the reporting period as well as one case of drug trafficking involving a 14-year-old, which is still under investigation as of January 2023. (4)

Research indicates that the Mauritius Police lacked both sufficient human resources and an adequate procedural mechanism for investigations of commercial child exploitation, especially those related to online sexual exploitation. (4,39) 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. (3,4)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established a key mechanism 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.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
CDU	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. (3,40-42) Managed by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare (MOGE), the budget for child protection, welfare, and development was \$4.5 million for fiscal year 2022–2023, which mainly funded CDU. (4,6)

The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking comprises representatives from the Attorney General's Office, the MOLHRDT, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, and other ministries. Chaired by the Attorney General's Office with the purpose of coordinating anti-trafficking efforts in Mauritius, this committee was reactivated by the cabinet in 2021 and met once in 2022. (3,4,43,46) The Children's Act that took effect in January 2022 provides for the creation of a Child Services Coordinating Panel, which is responsible for the coordination of all activities relating to the implementation of this new law, the UN CRC, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The panel met six times during 2022. (3,4,23,46)

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. (3,4,6)

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.

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Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description & Activities
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. (47,48)
National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (2022–2026)†	On December 09, 2022, the Government of Mauritius approved a new national action plan to combat human trafficking for implementation. (46)
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. (38,49)

†The policy adopted was created during the reporting period.

Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor in Mauritius during the reporting period. (3,4) 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 other policies to address the worst forms of child labor, such as commercial sexual exploitation. In December 2022, the government formally adopted a national action plan to combat human trafficking, which was initially drafted in 2016 and revised in 2022. (4,36,39,43,46,50)

Despite positive developments in recent years, discrimination against children with disabilities continues in Mauritius, with many being excluded and denied the right to an education. (4) Children with physical disabilities have the right to attend public schools, but are often turned away because they could not be accommodated. Additionally, children with mental disabilities attended separate schools that received inadequate government funding. (51)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, 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 inadequate efforts to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description & Activities
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. (7,52) Awareness-raising campaigns reached 10,266 primary and secondary school students from January to October 2022. (4) 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 and delivered psychological support and counseling for child residents (4,5) 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. (5)
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. (5) Research could not determine activities conducted during the reporting period. (43)
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. (3,7) Between January and October 2022, MOGE, through CDU, participated in six radio and television programs to raise awareness on children's rights and child abuse. CDU also organized a high-level training on the commercial sexual exploitation of children in November 2022 for approximately 33 people. (4)

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† Program is funded by the Government of Mauritius.

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 I I).

Table I I. 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 – 2022
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions limit the number of hours for light work.	2019 – 2022
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted in all sectors in which children work, including in the informal sector.	2018 – 2022
	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 – 2022
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies are active and are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2018 – 2022
	Ensure that coordination mechanisms to address the worst forms of child labor share information and policy-making decisions, improve coordination, and prevent overlap.	2012 – 2022
	Ensure that a coordinating body exists that comprehensively addresses child labor.	2019 – 2022
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement key policies related to child labor and publish results from activities implemented.	2019 – 2022
Social Programs	Collect and publish data on the extent and nature of child labor in Mauritius to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2022
	Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education.	2014 – 2022
	Ensure that child survivors of commercial sexual exploitation have access to comprehensive and quality social services and standards of care.	2010 – 2022
	Publish activities undertaken to implement the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Program.	2019 – 2022

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