

Congo, Republic of the (Brazzaville)

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

The Republic of the Congo is participating in a regional program to prevent the participation of children involved in armed conflicts in Central Africa, which sponsored by ILO-IPEC and funded by USDOL.⁶⁰¹ The Ministry of Education is working with UNICEF and UNESCO to rebuild school facilities damaged during the country's armed conflicts, provide school supplies to vulnerable families, and train teachers.⁶⁰² UN agencies are implementing poverty reduction projects that focus on human rights, health, and employment.⁶⁰³

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 1999, the ILO estimated that 25.5 percent of children between the ages of 10 and 14 in the Republic of the Congo were working.⁶⁰⁴ Many of the children work for their families in rural areas or in informal business activities in cities.⁶⁰⁵ Isolated cases of child prostitution have also been reported.⁶⁰⁶ During a civil war that began in 1993 and lasted for seven years, pro-government militias and rebel groups systematically recruited children.⁶⁰⁷ Following a cease-fire in December 1999, all parties agreed to demobilize all their soldiers, including children. While large numbers of soldiers returned to civilian life, the process of demobilization has proceeded irregularly, and it is unclear whether some children remain in militias.⁶⁰⁸ It is alleged that traditional practices exist in

⁶⁰¹ ILO, *Phase I: Regional Programme on the Prevention and Reintegration of Children Involved in Armed Conflicts in Central Africa*, project document (Geneva, 2001).

⁶⁰² "Education: Support to Primary Education," UN Plan for Republic of the Congo, 2001-2002, at <http://www.mirror/undp/congo> on 1/2/02.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ *World Development Indicators 2001* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2001) [hereinafter *World Development Indicators 2001*] [CD-ROM].

⁶⁰⁵ *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2000—Congo* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 2001)[hereinafter *Country Reports 2000*], Section 6d, at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/af/index.cfm?docid=763>.

⁶⁰⁶ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁶⁰⁷ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Global Report 2001: Congo* [hereinafter *Global Report 2001*], at <http://www.child-soldiers.org> on 10/23/01.

⁶⁰⁸ See *Global Report 2001*. Estimates are virtually impossible to obtain. Roger Bouka Owoko of Human Rights Congo told a USDOL official in July 2000 that the general in charge of demobilization efforts said that there were more than 1,500 ex-militiamen under age 18. However, no serious survey has been conducted, and even militia commanders did not know the number and ages of the people in their units. Many militia units had teenage members, but it was unclear whether they fought. See Bouka Owoko, Director of Communications, Congolese Human Rights Watch, interview by USDOL official, July 25, 2000.

which ethnic Pygmies, possibly including children, work as indentured servants for ethnic Bantus in remote northern areas of the country.⁶⁰⁹

Primary school education is compulsory for children between the ages of 6 and 11.⁶¹⁰ The gross primary enrollment rate was 114.3 percent in 1995.⁶¹¹ More than 50 percent of the Congo's school-age children, however, reportedly do not attend school.⁶¹² Many classroom buildings were damaged because of the civil war, and schools have few educational materials, and poor hygiene/sanitation systems.⁶¹³ High dropout rates in urban and rural areas are reportedly due to poverty, teacher absenteeism, and poor learning conditions. According to UNICEF, 1,714 schools in the country need rehabilitation.⁶¹⁴ Lack of resources has made it very difficult for the Ministry of Education to rehabilitate the facilities and rebuild the system.⁶¹⁵

⁶⁰⁹ Little reliable information exists on the scope of the problem. See *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6c. The Congo Government argues that what may appear to be slavery is in fact an arrangement whereby the Pygmies, who are hunters, work for monetary compensation on farms owned by the Bantus. See Embassy of the Republic of Congo diplomatic note 2267/MAECF-CAB/CAJ, October 25, 2001, to USDOL [hereinafter diplomatic note 2267/MAECF-CAB/CAJ].

⁶¹⁰ UNESCO, International Association of Universities, *Higher Education System: Congo—Education System*, at <http://www.unesco.org/iau/cd-data/cg.rtf> on 12/19/01.

⁶¹¹ *World Development Indicators 2001*.

⁶¹² “UNICEF to Build and Rehabilitate Schools,” UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, September 7, 2001, at <http://allafrica.com/stories/200109070016.html> on 10/23/01. See also UNICEF, “UNICEF Emergency Programmes, Republic of Congo Donor Update,” March 7, 2000, at <http://www.unicef.org/emerg/congomar.htm>, on 10/26/01.

⁶¹³ UNICEF, *UNICEF Humanitarian Action: Republic of Congo Donor Update*, September 4, 2001, at <http://www.reliefweb.int/w/Rwb.nsf/vID/2C45D0903EF3950D85256ABD005B3D8D?OpenDocument> on 10/31/01.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The minimum age for employment is 16, unless specifically permitted by the Ministry of Education.⁶¹⁶ The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including that performed by children.⁶¹⁷ Procuring any person for the purposes of prostitution is illegal, with increased punishment if the crime is committed with a minor.⁶¹⁸ The Ministry of Labor is responsible for enforcing child labor laws but concentrates its efforts only on the formal wage sector and does not monitor either the rural or the informal sectors, where most child labor occurs.⁶¹⁹ The Republic of the Congo ratified ILO Convention 138 on November 26, 1999, and ratified ILO Convention 182 on April 29, 2002.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁶ Diplomatic note 2267/MAECF-CAB/CAJ.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ The Protection Project Database, Section 2, Article 225-7, at <http://209.190.246.234/vt/2.htm> on 2/10/02.

⁶¹⁹ *Country Reports 2000* at Section 6d.

⁶²⁰ ILO, International Labour Standards, List of Ratifications of International Labour Conventions: Congo, at <http://webfusion.ilo.org/public/db/standards/normes/appl/index.cfm?lang'EN>.

NOTE: Hard copies of all Web citations are on file.