

Mauritius

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

In 1998, the Government of Mauritius worked with UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) to study child prostitution and in 2000, the government developed a National Action Plan to Combat Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Mauritius. One of the elements of the plan has been to pass laws that strengthen government capacity to address child prostitution. In 1990, the government also enacted legislation establishing the National Children's Council, a body to coordinate ministry and NGO efforts to combat child abuse, neglect and exploitation.²³³⁰ The government is currently working with social partners to develop a comprehensive policy on child labor.²³³¹

In 2001, the government announced an education reform plan to increase the mandatory education age to 16, provide additional secondary schools and increase access to secondary school education.²³³² Based upon the country's economic performance and government achievements in improving the well being of children and young people, UNICEF will close out funding allocations in Mauritius by 2003.²³³³

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 2.0 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Mauritius were working.²³³⁴ The Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development, and Family Welfare reported that in 1998, approximately 2000 children between the ages of 12 and 14 were either employed or looking for work.²³³⁵ Children are usually found working on the streets, in small businesses and in agriculture.²³³⁶ On the island of Rodrigues, children are found working in homes, on farms and in shops.²³³⁷ In 1998, the UNICEF/WHO study on commercial sexual exploitation of children

²³³⁰ ILO-CEACR, *Individual Observation concerning Convention no. 29, Forced Labor, 1930 Mauritius (ratification: 1969)*, ILO-Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Geneva, 2002; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>.

²³³¹ N. Nababsing, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labor and Industrial Relations, Republic of Mauritius, survey questionnaire response to USDOL official, September 2001, 3.

²³³² U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2001: Mauritius*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 457-59, Section 5 available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8393.htm>.

²³³³ In 1997, the UNICEF Executive Board decided to gradually phase out funding allocations for countries that had achieved established threshold levels for gross national product (USD 2,895 per capita) and under 5 mortality rates (30 deaths per 1000). In the 1990s, Mauritius reached these thresholds. UNICEF, *Mauritius: An Island Fit for Children*, [online] July 31, 2002 [cited August 29, 2002]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/noteworthy/mauritius>.

²³³⁴ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

²³³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Mauritius*, 459-61, Section 6d.

²³³⁶ Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 3.

²³³⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Mauritius*, 459-61, Section 6d.

indicated that children as young as 13 are engaged in prostitution in several districts in Mauritius.²³³⁸ There have been reports that children are also trafficked from Madagascar to Mauritius for prostitution.²³³⁹

The Education Act provides for compulsory and free primary schooling until the age of 12.²³⁴⁰ In 1996, the government subsidized the school fees of each 4-year-old as a way to ensure that each child starts primary school with at least one year of pre-school experience.²³⁴¹ In 1998, approximately 96 percent of the children entering primary school had completed at least one year of pre-primary schooling. In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 107.7 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 93.3 percent.²³⁴² Attendance rates are not available for Mauritius. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.²³⁴³

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Act of 1975 sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years.²³⁴⁴ Under the Occupational Safety, Health and Welfare Act of 1989, young persons between the ages of 15 and 18 are allowed to work in hazardous work settings provided they are trained to operate machinery and are supervised by an experienced operator.²³⁴⁵ The Criminal Code contains provisions prohibiting child prostitution, and the sale, trafficking and abduction of children.²³⁴⁶ In 1998, the penalties for persons operating brothels were increased from a fine of 3,000 rupees (USD 102) and imprisonment not to exceed one year, to a fine of 100,000 rupees (USD 3,384) and imprisonment not to exceed five years. Penalties for persons convicted of the sale, trafficking or abduction of a

²³³⁸ ILO-CEACR, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*. See also Nasseem Ackbarally, *Report Says Child Prostitution Rampant in Mauritius*, [online] October 9, 2000 [cited August 13, 2002]; available from <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/36/313.html>.

²³³⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Mauritius*, 459-61, Section 6f.

²³⁴⁰ Children begin primary school at the age of 5 and are expected to complete primary education at age 12. Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 3 and 10.

²³⁴¹ UNESCO, *Education for All 2000 Assessments: Country Reports - Mauritius*, prepared by Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, pursuant to UN General Assembly Resolution 52/84, [cited August 13, 2002]; available from <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/mauritius/contents.html>. At the end of the sixth grade, students must take a nationally administered test to qualify for secondary school. In 1997, the repetition rate for sixth grade was 21 percent, and 63 percent of the students obtained a certificate of primary education. *UNESCO, EFA 2000 Report: Mauritius*.

²³⁴² World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

²³⁴³ For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

²³⁴⁴ The country's child labor laws cover all sectors. Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 1.

²³⁴⁵ Children are not required to clean machinery if this would expose them to the risk of injury. *Ibid.*, 2.

²³⁴⁶ The Criminal Code was amended in 1998. ILO-CEACR, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

child are a fine of least 10,000 rupees (USD 338) or a prison sentence not to exceed five years.²³⁴⁷ Forced and bonded labor by children is illegal.²³⁴⁸

The Ministry of Labor and Industrial Relations is the government agency that oversees the enforcement of child labor laws. There are 39 labor inspectors and eight labor officers whose duties include investigating child labor practices. In 2000, over 5250 child labor inspections were conducted and from January to June 2001, 2,421 child labor inspections were conducted.²³⁴⁹ The police enforce laws on child prostitution. According to a June 2000 report by the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, the existing legal provisions on child prostitution were not comprehensive enough to prosecute child sexual exploitation adequately, and there was insufficient police resolve, capacity and sensitivity to intervene in cases of child prostitution.²³⁵⁰

The Government of Mauritius ratified ILO Convention 138 on July 30, 1990, and ILO Convention 182 on June 8, 2000.²³⁵¹

²³⁴⁷ Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 3. For currency conversion, see FX Converter, [online] [cited October 8, 2002]; available from <http://www.carosta.de/frames/convert.htm>.

²³⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Mauritius*, 459-61, Section 6c.

²³⁴⁹ Nababsing, Child Labor Questionnaire response, September 2001, 7.

²³⁵⁰ ILO-CEACR, *Individual Observation- Convention 29*.

²³⁵¹ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited December 16, 2002]; available from <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.