

In 2011, Mauritius made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, and established the Child Mentoring Scheme, which provides one-on-one counseling to at-risk children. However, the Government lacks a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor and does not currently ensure that victims of commercial sexual exploitation have access to comprehensive, quality services. Children in Mauritius are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, primarily in commercial sexual exploitation, although the extent of the problem is unknown.

Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Attending School	5-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	7-14 yrs.	Unavailable
Primary Completion Rate		96.0

Sources:

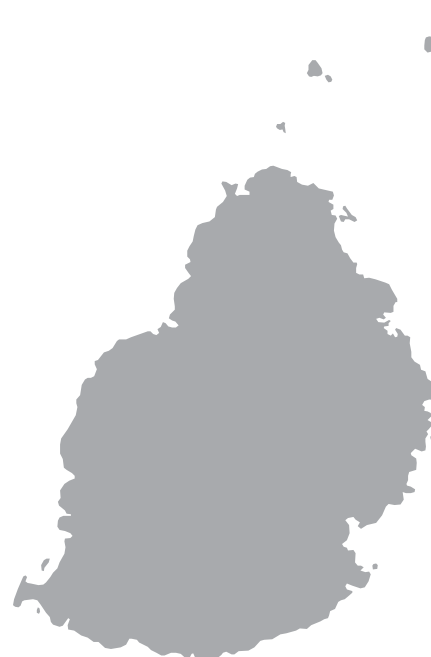
Primary completion rate: Data from 2010, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Mauritius are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, primarily in commercial sexual exploitation, although the extent of the problem is unknown.(3, 4) The UN Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography visited Mauritius in May 2011 and found, through anecdotal reports, that the scale of child prostitution in the country seems to be growing.(5) Some children are reportedly lured into prostitution by their peers or through false offers of other employment. Some adult prostitutes reportedly force their sons and daughters into prostitution.(3, 5, 6) Although information is limited, children are reportedly engaged in the production of pornography.(7)

Available evidence suggests a low incidence of other worst forms of child labor in Mauritius and its dependencies, such as Rodrigues Island. Although information is limited and the extent of the problem is unknown, some children reportedly



work in dangerous activities in agriculture, street vending and domestic service.(3, 8, 9) Children working in agriculture may use dangerous tools, carry heavy loads and apply harmful pesticides.(10) Children working on the streets are vulnerable to severe weather, traffic accidents and crime.(11) Children employed as domestics may work long hours and are isolated in private homes, where they are susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(12)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Employment Rights Act sets the minimum age for work at 16. Children under age 18 are prohibited from work that is likely to jeopardize their health, safety, or their physical, mental, moral or social development.(13) The Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act identifies these specific work activities, which include work with heavy metals and work in the forestry or construction sectors. It is illegal to employ youth ages 16 to 18 to work in any industrial setting between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. Employers are required to maintain records of all employees ages 16 to 18.(13)

The Child Protection Act forbids causing, inciting or allowing any child under age 18 to engage in prostitution. The Criminal Code provides for penalties against procuring, exploiting or enticing a prostitute, including a child prostitute.(5) The Child Protection Act also prohibits the "taking, distribution, showing, possession with intention to distribute or to show, any indecent photograph" of a child, including electronic images.(5) The Combating Trafficking in Persons Act

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establishes trafficking as a criminal offense, including trafficking of children. The Act also requires Internet service providers to inform the police of any information that suggests or alludes to trafficking on its server.(14) The Constitution prohibits forced labor and slavery.(15)

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓
	Minimum Age for Work	16
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	17
	Free Public Education	Yes

There is no compulsory military recruitment, and the voluntary recruitment age is 18.(16) Education is free and compulsory to age 17.(17)

In June 2011, the Government of Mauritius ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.(18, 19)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

Research found no evidence that the Government of Mauritius has established a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor. The Government established the National Children's Council (NCC) in 1990 following its ratification of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.(5) The NCC is an independent, para-governmental entity governing child protection issues in the country.(5) During the reporting period, the NCC collaborated with the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare to discuss a new child protection bill.(3)

The Inspection and Enforcement Division of the Ministry of Labor, Industrial Relations, and Employment (MOLIRE) enforces all labor laws, including those related to child labor.(3)

It employs 45 inspectors and is responsible for conducting all regular labor inspections, including monitoring for child labor.(9, 20) From January to October 2011, the most recent period for which data is available, the MOLIRE inspections found no cases of child labor.(3, 20) The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children also has the authority to investigate any suspected or reported case of child labor. In 2011, this Office did not investigate any child labor cases.(20, 21) When a child labor violation is found, the MOLIRE carries out unannounced follow-up inspections to deter repeat offenses.(9) Prosecution is usually pursued against repeat offenders.(22) Violations related to the hazardous work provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Act are referred to the MOLIRE's OSH Division.(9)

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (MGE) is the lead agency of an interagency ad hoc working committee on trafficking in persons, but this body has not been formalized, leading to ineffective coordination among relevant ministries and inconsistent service provision to victims.(6, 23) In the final report of her mission to Mauritius in May 2011, the UN Special Rapporteur noted that coordination and cooperation among government agencies and with civil society groups seems to be a persistent challenge in addressing commercial sexual exploitation and related child protection issues in the country.(5)

The Police Brigade for the Protection of Minors (Minors' Brigade), a unit of the Mauritius Police Force (MPF), patrols areas such as arcades, bus terminals and other areas where youth are vulnerable to involvement in commercial sexual exploitation.(5) The MGE, the NCC and NGOs also participate in these operations.(24) The MGE has established Family Service Bureaus throughout the country to receive calls and handle walk-in visits related to any situation involving harm to children. The Bureaus are staffed with family welfare officers, psychologists, police officers and family counselors.(5) The MGE's Child Development Unit (CDU) also receives tips on all forms of child abuse, including commercial sexual exploitation and child trafficking, through two telephone hotlines. From January to November 2011, the CDU received reports of 12 cases of child trafficking and 2 cases of child prostitution.(3) The Minors' Brigade investigates these cases while the CDU provides follow-up assistance to victims.(25) However, the CDU suffers from a lack of resources and personnel, with only 10 family welfare officers to serve Mauritius and Rodrigues Islands, leading to insufficient service provision.(5)

In 2010, the most recent time period for which information is available, the Government prosecuted three cases of child

prostitution, involving nine offenders. As of May 2011, one case of child pornography was pending in the courts.(5)

The MGE provides training to police officers on commercial sexual exploitation. The MPF has also conducted a series of training sessions on commercial sexual exploitation, child abuse and trafficking in persons for police officers working in stations around the country, as well as for the Police Prosecutor's Unit, the Criminal Investigation Unit, and the Passport and Immigration Office.(9)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government does not have a national policy that specifically targets child labor. It has a Protocol of Assistance to Victims of Sexual Assault that lays out procedures to be followed by police and other officials when handling sexual abuse cases, including commercial sexual exploitation.(26) In addition, the Government's Child Safety Online Action Plan aims to prevent sexual exploitation of children on the Internet by strengthening the legal framework and raising awareness among parents and children.(25)

The Government's National Policy Paper on the Family lays out strategies to support child welfare through holistic support for families, including job training for parents.(27) The Government's Education and Human Resources Strategy Plan (2008-2020) aims to improve equity of access to primary, secondary and technical/vocational education, among other goals.(28)

The draft UNDP Country Program for Mauritius includes improving the education of vulnerable children through programs such as the *Zones d'Education Prioritaire* (ZEP), discussed below.(29) Although the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) does not explicitly discuss child labor, together with other poverty alleviation programs, it emphasizes child retention in school as a means to ensure equal opportunity for all.(9)

The question of whether these policies have an impact on the worst forms of child labor does not appear to have been addressed.

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Government carries out a number of activities to prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation, including widespread public awareness raising in schools and community centers, as well as on the radio and on television. The Government also holds workshops commercial sexual exploitation of

children (CSEC) for vulnerable groups, and participates in working groups with private sector and civil society actors on anti-trafficking and CSEC issues.(5, 19, 24) The Ministry of Tourism publishes and distributes pamphlets on trafficking to tourism companies, including tour operators and hotels.(23)

In the area of victim services, the Government operates drop-in centers that provide counseling and education to victims of sexual abuse, including commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children.(23, 30) When victims report such abuses, child welfare officers are available to accompany them as they receive immediate medical care. These officers then work in conjunction with the police if an official statement is needed.(6) The CDU provides a variety of follow-up support services, including counseling, legal support and reintegration, although it does face significant resource constraints as noted above.(5, 31)

If institutional care is needed, victims are referred to government or NGO shelters, many of which receive government funding.(5, 23, 30) However, these facilities are overcrowded, service providers are overtaxed and the facilities lack appropriate training, and institutions do not have appropriate standards of care, leading to inadequate rehabilitative services for this vulnerable population.(5, 6) In addition, child victims of prostitution are sometimes placed, by court order, in residential centers for youth on probation. The UN Special Rapporteur has expressed concern about child victims of prostitution placed in such facilities, where they may not receive appropriate treatment.(5)

The Government provides free school materials, lunches and medical examinations to economically underprivileged students.(32) The ZEP Program, initially piloted on Rodrigues and Agalega Islands, is being scaled up to primary schools throughout the country. This Program has been shown to reduce school drop-outs through enhanced community participation in education.(19, 29) The Government's Strategy for Special Education Needs and Inclusive Education in Mauritius includes a program for at-risk primary school students outside of school hours that focuses on physical education and the arts.(25) In 2011, the MGE launched a Child Mentoring Scheme that provides one-on-one counseling to at-risk children through a Government-selected mentor.(3, 19) The public school system also includes a pre-vocational track for youth who are at risk of exploitation or of becoming drop-outs.(19, 22)

The Ministry of Finance operates the Trust Fund for the Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups, which provides funding to NGOs for community development and family livelihood improvement programs.(3, 9) The MGE also operates the

National Parental Empowerment Program to strengthen overall family livelihoods.(32)

The question of whether these programs have an impact on child labor does not appear to have been addressed.

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Mauritius:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Coordination and Enforcement	Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Formalize an interagency coordination mechanism on TIP.	2010, 2011
	Increase investigations and prosecutions of CSEC crimes, and punish offenders.	2010, 2011
	Provide necessary resources to the Child Development Unit to ensure adequate service delivery for victims.	2011
Policies	Assess the impact that existing policies have had on the worst forms of child labor.	2010, 2011
Social Programs	Ensure that victims of CSEC have access to comprehensive, quality services.	2010, 2011
	Refrain from placing CSEC victims in facilities designed for youth on probation.	2011
	Assess the impact that existing programs may have on addressing child labor, particularly CSEC.	2009, 2010, 2011

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