

In 2012, Mauritius made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government continued its efforts to combat commercial sexual exploitation by creating a sub-committee to facilitate inter-agency coordination, operating drop-in centers, and providing services via its Child Development Unit. In addition, the Government continued efforts to increase access to quality education through strategies such as the Zones d'Education Prioritaire (ZEP) and vocational programs for school drop outs. However, the Government 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		94.9

Sources:

Primary completion rate: Data from 2011, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis, 2013.(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 (CSEC), although the extent of the problem is unknown.(3-5) Recent unofficial estimates report that the scale of the problem has been reduced even though accurate figures are not available.(5) However, 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 CSEC in the country seems to be growing.(6) Some children are lured into CSEC by their peers or through false offers of other employment. Some adult prostitutes force their sons and daughters into CSEC.(4, 7) Although information is limited, children are reportedly engaged in the production of pornography.(8)

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



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 and in domestic service.(4, 9, 10) Children working in agriculture may use dangerous tools, carry heavy loads, and apply harmful pesticides.(11, 12) Children working in domestic service may be required to work long hours, performing strenuous tasks without sufficient food or shelter. These children may be isolated in private homes, making them susceptible to physical and sexual abuse.(13, 14)

There are reports of children working on the streets, but specific information on hazards is unknown.

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 or safety, or their physical, mental, moral, or social development.(15) The Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act identifies specific work activities prohibited to young persons 16 to 18 years old, which includes work with heavy metals and work in the forestry or construction sectors.(16) 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.(15) The Constitution prohibits forced labor and slavery.(17)

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International Conventions and Selected Laws on Child Labor and Education

	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	16
	Free Public Education	Yes

The Combating Trafficking in Persons Act 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.(18) 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.(6) The Child Protection Act also prohibits distributing, showing, taking, or possessing with the intention of showing or distributing any indecent photograph of a child, including electronic images.(6)

There is no compulsory military recruitment because Mauritius has no military. The voluntary recruitment age for the Police Force, which includes other security forces, is 18.(19-22) Education is free and compulsory to age 16.(23, 24)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The Government has created a National Child Protection Committee (NCPC, also known as the Working Together Committee) that includes key stakeholders related to the coordination and implementation of child protection policies.(24, 25) The NCPC coordinates the roles and responsibilities of the relevant ministries and ensures there is effective collaboration on effective intervention on cases

involving children, including the worst forms of child labor.(21, 24) Under the auspices of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (MOGE), the Government established the National Children's Council (NCC) in 1990 following its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.(6) The NCC is an independent, para-governmental entity that serves as the executive of child protection programs and focuses on child protection issues in the country.(6) During the reporting period, the MOGE consulted the NCC and various child protection service providers to discuss a new Consolidated Children's Bill.(4, 21) Significant overlap appears to exist between the committees involved in child protection issues, and it is unclear if worst forms of child labor are specifically coordinated through the NCC.

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.(4) It employs 45 inspectors and is responsible for conducting all regular labor inspections, including monitoring for child labor.(10, 26) From January 1, 2012 to November 2012, the MOLIRE inspections found no cases of child labor.(4) Information was not available on the number of labor inspections conducted. The Office of the Ombudsperson for Children also has the authority to investigate any suspected or reported case of child labor.(27) The 2012 Ombudsperson for Children Annual Report indicated that the Office investigated the absence of four children from school in alleged child labor cases. It reported that three of the children are back in school and that follow-up is being maintained on the fourth.(27, 28) When a child labor violation is found, the MOLIRE carries out unannounced follow-up inspections to deter repeat offenses.(10) Prosecution is usually pursued against repeat offenders.(29) Violations related to the hazardous work provisions of the OSH Act are referred to the MOLIRE's OSH Division.(10)

The MOGE is the lead agency for implementing anti-Trafficking in Persons (TIP) policies and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is the coordinating agency for government anti-TIP policies.(5, 7) The MOGE established a sub-committee with the NCPC to facilitate inter-agency coordination on the CSEC.(21) Despite efforts to improve inter-agency coordination, a formal and permanent anti-TIP coordinating body does not exist and a lack of understanding of TIP by government officials has prevented the Government from effectively addressing the issue.(5, 7, 21) In addition, 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.(6)

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 in which youth are vulnerable to involvement in commercial sexual exploitation.(4, 6) The MOGE, the NCC, and NGOs also participate in these operations.(30) The MOGE 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.(6) The MOGE'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 2012, the CDU received reports of six cases of child trafficking and five cases of child prostitution.(4) The Minors' Brigade investigates these cases while the CDU provides follow-up assistance to victims.(31) However, the CDU suffers from a lack of resources and personnel, with only nine family welfare officers to serve Mauritius and one for Rodrigues, leading to insufficient service provision.(6)

In 2012, the most recent time period for which information is available, the Government prosecuted four cases of child prostitution, involving seven offenders.(21) As of May 2011, one case of child pornography was pending in the courts.(6)

The MPF provides anti-TIP training to new recruits as part of basic training requirements. During the reporting period, over 200 new recruits received training.(5) Training on preventing CSEC was provided by an NGO to 30 officials from the Government including the police, Ministry of Tourism, the probation service, and the MOGE. The USDOJ provided the Children as Victims and Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System training, with a substantial anti-TIP component, to over 150 government officials.(5)

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 Abuse that lays out procedures to be followed by police and other officials when handling sexual abuse cases, including commercial sexual exploitation.(4, 32) 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.(4, 31)

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.(33) 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.(34)

The draft UNDP Country Program for Mauritius includes improving the education of vulnerable children through programs such as the ZEP.(24, 35) Although the Government's 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.(10)

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

The Government is currently developing a comprehensive national child protection strategy to establish a coordinated response to child protection issues.(4)

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 television. The Government also holds workshops on CSEC for vulnerable groups, and participates in working groups with private sector and civil society actors on anti-trafficking and CSEC issues.(6, 24, 30) The Ministry of Tourism publishes and distributes pamphlets on trafficking to tourism companies, including tour operators and hotels.(36)

In the area of victim services, the Government operates drop-in centers that provide counseling and referrals to victims of sexual abuse, including CSEC and trafficking of children.(22, 36) 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.(7) The CDU provides a variety of support services, including counseling, legal support, and reintegration, although it does face significant resource constraints as noted above.(6, 37)

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If institutional care is needed, victims are referred to government or NGO shelters, most of which receive government funding.(6, 22, 36) However, these facilities are overcrowded, service providers are overtaxed and lack appropriate training, and institutions do not have appropriate standards of care, leading to inadequate rehabilitative services for this vulnerable population.(6) In addition, child victims of prostitution are sometimes placed by court order in residential centers for youth on probation. Child victims of prostitution placed in such facilities may not receive appropriate treatment.(6)

The Government provides free school materials, lunches and medical examinations to economically underprivileged students.(38) The ZEP program aims to combat social inequalities by providing equal opportunities to all primary school children throughout the country. This program has been shown to reduce school dropouts through enhanced community participation in education.(24, 35) 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.(31) The MOGE operates a Child Mentoring Scheme that provides one-on-one counseling to at-risk children through a government-selected mentor.(24, 39) The public school system also includes a pre-vocational track for youth who are at risk of exploitation or of becoming drop outs.(24, 29) In addition, the Government has a pilot Summer and Winter school program to enhance the successful transition from primary to secondary school for students in addition to a Second Chance Program to educate and provide vocational training and life skills to those who dropped out after age 16.(4, 24)

The Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment operates a National Empowerment Foundation which provides comprehensive support to deprived children through a Child and Family Development program. The program includes day care facilities, assistance with preschool education, and holiday camps for children during school breaks.(24)

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	Ensure that all government efforts to address the worst forms of child labor are coordinated by the National Child Protection Committee and that any overlap in coordination is addressed.	2012
	Establish a formal and permanent structure to coordinate anti-TIP efforts and increase anti-TIP training for government officials.	2012
	Increase investigations and prosecutions of CSEC crimes, and punish offenders.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Provide necessary resources to the Child Development Unit to ensure adequate service delivery for victims.	2011, 2012
	Make information publicly available on the number of labor inspections conducted.	2012
Policies	Assess the impact that existing policies have had on the worst forms of child labor.	2010, 2011, 2012
Social Programs	Ensure that victims of CSEC have access to comprehensive, quality services.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Refrain from placing CSEC victims in facilities designed for youth on probation.	2011, 2012
	Assess the impact that existing programs may have on addressing child labor, particularly CSEC.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

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