

In 2019, Mauritius made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government approved the Workers' Rights Act, which strengthened protections for working children, and continued to implement social programs to support public education around the country. However, children in Mauritius engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in illicit activities. Children also engage in child labor in construction and street work. The government did not collect nor publish data on criminal law enforcement, and gaps remain in the implementation of key policies and social programs related to child labor.

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



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Mauritius engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in illicit activities. (1-3) Children also engage in child labor in construction and street work. (1,2) 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 (%)		100.8

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (4) Data were unavailable from International Labor Organization's analysis, 2020. (5)

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	Cultivating and harvesting vegetables (1,2)
	Fishing, including diving, and casting nets and traps (2,7)
Industry	Construction (8)
Services	Domestic work (1,2)
	Working in apparel shops and restaurants (2)
	Street work, including vending, begging, and carrying goods in public markets (1,2,9,10)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2)
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (2)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Research indicates that Mauritius typically experiences an uptick in child labor activities during the holiday season, November to December. Drug trafficking by children intensified during the reporting period, including both marijuana and synthetic drugs. (2) Some children in Mauritius are brought into commercial sexual exploitation by their peers or family members, or through fraudulent offers of other employment. (1,2,11) Mauritius has never conducted a national child labor survey and, therefore, information on the prevalence of child labor in the country is limited. (12,13) Child labor is known to primarily occur in the informal sector, in which monitoring and enforcement are more challenging. (2)

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Research indicates that children in Mauritius are more vulnerable to child labor during breaks in the school year. They are likely to help with family businesses when not in school. (2) Evidence suggests that incidents of physical and psychological abuse, including corporal punishment of students by teachers, prevent some children from attending school, which increases their risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labor. Due to discrimination, children with disabilities face significant barriers in accessing education. (1, 14)

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	✓

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 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	No	16	Article 2 and 8 of the Workers' Rights Act, (15)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 2 and 9 of the Workers' Rights Act (15)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Section 8 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (16)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	No		Article 6 of the Constitution; Article 2 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act (17, 18)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 13A of the Child Protection Act; Article 21 of the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act (18, 19)
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 (1, 18-20)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 30.1b-e, 38a, 41.1f, and 41.2 of the Dangerous Drugs Act (21)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	N/A†		
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*†		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Article 37.2 of the Education Act (22)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 35 of the Education Act (22)

* No conscription

† No standing military

In October 2019, the Workers' Rights Act came into operation, repealing the Employment Rights Act. (2) 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. In addition, children are allowed to work alongside their parents in places such as a family farm or business when not in school. (2,15)

For several years, the government has been considering adopting the Children's Bill, which aims to strengthen the existing legal framework to combat the worst forms of child labor. (2,23) In September 2019, the Children's Bill was introduced to Parliament, but it has not yet received a vote. (2,13)

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 authority of the Ministry of Labor, Industrial Relations, Employment, and Training (MOLIRE) that may hinder adequate enforcement of child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor, Human Resource Development and Training (MOLHRDT)	Enforces all labor laws, including those related to child labor. (24) Throughout the reporting period, MOLHRDT performed dozens of trainings and sensitization programs for hundreds of children about teenage pregnancy and CSEC. In December, Ministry of Labor, Industrial Relations, Employment, and Training (MOLIRE) became Ministry of Labor, Human Resource Development and Training (MOLHRDT). (25)
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. (26,27)
Police Brigade for the Protection of Minors (Minors' Brigade)	Investigates crimes related to the worst forms of child labor, including child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. (23) Maintains a database of all human trafficking incidents involving children, and refers all cases of commercial sexual exploitation to the Child Development Unit. (28)
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions	Undertakes criminal proceedings on laws related to the worst forms of child labor in coordination with the Minors' Brigade and the judicial courts. (29,30)
Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare's (MOGE) Child Development Unit	Enforces legislation related to children and implements policies and social programs related to child development. (3,12,31) Provides social services to victims of the worst forms of child labor, including human trafficking. Provides trainings and awareness campaigns against human trafficking, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (3,12,31) In 2019, MOGE continued to provide counseling and psychological support as well as operate three state-run shelters. (13)

The Child Protection Act, Section 11, requires medical and paramedical professionals, as well as school staff, to report any cases of child labor or abuse. (1,19) MOLIRE reported that labor inspections are not carried out in homes or private farms because labor inspectors are asked to receive advance consent from the owner in order to conduct an inspection.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, labor law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the authority of the Ministry of Labor, Industrial Relations, Employment, and Training (MOLIRE) that may hinder adequate enforcement of its child labor laws.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1.5 million (8)	\$1,469,555† (2)
Number of Labor Inspectors	89 (8)	129 (2)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (8)	No (15)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (8)	Yes (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (8)	Yes (2)

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Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor (Cont.)

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	9,215 (32)	10,601 (25)
Number Conducted at Worksite	4,687 (32)	4,660 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	4 (33)	4 (2)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A	1 (2)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A	1 (2)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (8)	Unknown (2)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (8)	Yes (2,15)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (2)

†Data are from July 2019 to June 2020.

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritius took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including insufficient resource allocation and lack of data availability.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (8)	Yes (2)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (8)	Yes (2)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (8)	Unknown (2)
Number of Violations Found	4 (33)	Unknown (2)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	4 (33)	Unknown (2)
Number of Convictions	1 (33)	Unknown (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (33)	Unknown (2)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (8)	Yes (2)

Research revealed that criminal law enforcement agencies lacked staff, transportation, and other resources to properly enforce criminal laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (2) The government does not publicize information on its criminal enforcement efforts and did not provide complete information for inclusion in this report. (2)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms 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 implementation of activities.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Trafficking	Coordinates anti-trafficking efforts in Mauritius. Chaired by the Attorney General's Office, comprises representatives from the Ministry of Labor, Industrial Relations, Employment, and Training, MOGE, and other ministries. (35,36) The committee met regularly during the reporting period. (8)
High Powered and Working Together Committee	Coordinates and implements activities on children's rights, including efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor. Chaired by MOGE. (2,31) The High Powered and Working Together Committee did not meet in 2019. (2)

The government's efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor were hindered by a lack of coordination and information-sharing between key coordinating mechanisms, as well as by a lack of consultation with NGOs working on child protection issues. There is no coordinating body whose primary focus is child labor. (2)

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 coverage of all the worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
Child Safety Online Action Plan (2009–2019)	Aimed to prevent the online sexual exploitation of children by strengthening the legal framework and developing awareness-raising programs. Implemented by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, in conjunction with MOGE, the Minors' Brigade, and the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children. (37) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken during the reporting period.
Education and Human Resources Strategy Plan (2008–2020)	Aims to improve equity of access to primary, secondary, and technical and vocational education, and to provide social services for youth. Overseen by the Ministry of Education. (38,39) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken during the reporting period.
Government Development Program—Achieving Meaningful Change (2015–2019)	Aimed to increase access to social protection services for vulnerable populations, including children, and emphasizes a zero-tolerance policy for the use of children in drug trafficking. (40–42) Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken during the reporting period.
National Sports and Physical Activity Policy (2018–2028)	Provides a structured sports program available to all ages. The policy focuses on children and young adults and is available after school hours, to help reduce children's vulnerability to child labor and illicit activities. (8,43) During the reporting period, the Sports Act (2016) was reviewed. New programs for maintenance of sports facilities and programs encouraging Mauritians to engage in sports were being created. (32)

Research found no evidence of policies aiming to combat other worst forms of child labor, such as commercial sexual exploitation. In addition, the National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking, drafted in 2016, has yet to be adopted by the government. (2,35,44,45)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, 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 implementation of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Awareness-Raising Programs on Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking†	MOGE program created to educate the public on preventing commercial sexual exploitation of children and human trafficking. Active during the reporting period. (2)
IOM Country Program	IOM program to build capacity of relevant government agencies to protect children from exploitation and human trafficking. (44,46) Research was unable to determine whether this program was active during the reporting period.
Education Assistance Programs†	Government programs that increase access to quality primary education for vulnerable children, designed to provide equal opportunities to primary school children throughout the country. Includes the Eradication of Absolute Poverty Program, which provides educational support to 7,500 households in 229 geographic pockets of poverty and in the Education Priority Zones and is designed to provide equal opportunities to primary school children throughout the country. (39) Research was unable to determine whether these programs were active during the reporting period.
National Children's Council†	Under MOGE, offers a wide range of services, including day care, shelters, creativity centers, children's clubs, and school child protection clubs around the island. In addition, has a program called "Atelier Partage Parents" for parental education, which has been functioning since 2012 and covers good parenting practices as well as focuses on violence and child abuse issues. (2) The National Children's Council met approximately once per month during the reporting period. (32)

† Program is funded by the Government of Mauritius.

Although the government has established an oversight body to improve the effectiveness of institutional care facilities and shelters, 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 victims of commercial sexual exploitation, and child victims of other types of abuses. (3,29,43,47,48)

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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 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Enforcement	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 – 2019
	Ensure labor inspectors conduct targeted inspections.	2019
	Publish information regarding the number of criminal investigations conducted, number of violations found, number of prosecutions initiated, number of convictions, and number of imposed penalties on the worst forms of child labor.	2018 – 2019
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement officials are fully funded, equipped, and trained to address the problems of the worst forms of child labor in Mauritius.	2019
Coordination	Ensure that all coordinating bodies, including the High Powered and Working Together Committee, are active and are able to carry out their intended mandates.	2018 – 2019
	Ensure that coordination mechanisms share information and policy-making decisions to combat the worst forms of child labor. Government should consult with all parties involved with anti-child labor activities, such as NGOs, industry, and other organizations, to ensure no overlap or gaps.	2012 – 2019
	Ensure a coordinating body exists that addresses child labor broadly.	2019
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses the worst forms of child labor, including commercial sexual exploitation.	2014 – 2019
	Adopt the draft National Plan to Combat Human Trafficking.	2017 – 2019
	Ensure that policies addressing child labor are active.	2019
	Collect and publish data on the prevalence of child labor in Mauritius to inform policies and programs.	2013 – 2019
	Ensure that all children, including those with disabilities, can attend school without fear of physical or psychological abuse.	2014 – 2019
	Ensure that child victims of commercial sexual exploitation have access to comprehensive and quality social services.	2010 – 2019
	Ensure that programs addressing child labor are active.	2019

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