

Mauritius

Country Overview

Politics

Mauritius is an island nation in the Indian Ocean located off the eastern coast of southern Africa. The country's governmental structure is described as a multiparty hybrid republic, with both a president and prime minister.¹ President Prithvirajsing Roopun assumed power in 2017 after his predecessor resigned. The President appoints the prime minister, who was Sir Anerood Jugnauth from 1982 until January 2017, when he stepped down in order for his son Pravind Kumar Jugnauth to be appointed.² Prime ministers are appointed by way of a majority vote in the Mauritian parliament. The parliamentary elections in December 2019 were reported to be generally free and fair by both international and local observers.³ The World Bank considers Mauritius to be a politically stable democracy.⁴

Economy

Mauritius is classified by the World Bank as an upper-middle-income economy.⁵ Mauritius' GDP has greatly increased since the country's independence in 1968, when the country began shifting from an agrarian economy to a more diversified economy including industry (particularly apparel manufacturing), financial services, and tourism. Since 2016, Mauritius' per-capita GDP has grown every year since 1984 with the exception of 2020, when it shrunk due to COVID-based shocks to the tourism industry.⁶ Real GDP has grown at an annual rate of 4.7 percent since 1964.⁷ Employment rates in agriculture and industry have been rapidly decreasing for both female and male workers, while the employment rates in services have dramatically increased. In 2017, 74.1 percent of the economy worked in the services sector, 21.8 percent worked in industry, and 4 percent worked in agriculture.⁸ The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports that Mauritius' economy depends on sugar, tourism, textiles and apparel, and financial services, but that the country is developing industries in fish processing, information and communications technology, and hospitality and property development.⁹

The World Bank's *Ease of Doing Business Economy Rankings* places Mauritius as the 13th easiest economy —out of the world's 190 economies— in which to conduct business. This gives Mauritius the highest ranking of any African nation.¹⁰ The U.S. Department of State reports that



the government of Mauritius is focused on promoting foreign and domestic investment in export-oriented industries, including fishing, clothing, and sugar.¹¹

Social/Human Development

The main ethnic group in Mauritius, constituting approximately two thirds of the total population, is Indo-Mauritian.¹² The other third of the country is composed of Creole, Sino-Mauritian, and Franco-Mauritian ethnic groups. However, the CIA notes that Mauritius has not included ethnic demographic questions on the national census since 1972. There is no indigenous population in Mauritius. The different ethnic groups arose from European colonialism and slave importation from Madagascar, Mozambique, and East Africa, indentured labor from India, and modern labor migration, mostly contract workers from China and India who come to work in the apparel and textile industry.¹³ According to the U.S. Department of State, the Creole (African) population faces higher poverty rates than the other ethnic groups.¹⁴ Social and workplace discrimination against Creole people has been reported to take place.¹⁵

Mauritius' Human Development Index score for 2022 was 0.802, ranking the country 63 out of 191 countries and placing it in the category of very high human development.¹⁶ The World Bank reported in 2017 that .1 percent of the population lived under \$2.15 per day.¹⁷ According to the CIA, 10.3 percent of the population fell below the national poverty line in 2017.¹⁸

U.S. Department of State TIP Report Summary

U.S. Department of State TIP Ranking: Tier 2 Watch List

According to the Trafficking in Persons Report, potentially exported supply chains with trafficking or trafficking vulnerability include offshore fishing and manufacturing. Despite the government banning the practice, withholding migrant workers' passports remains common. Labor recruitment intermediaries often use dishonest tactics to attract foreign workers to Mauritius.¹⁹

Read the full TIP Report at: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/mauritius/>

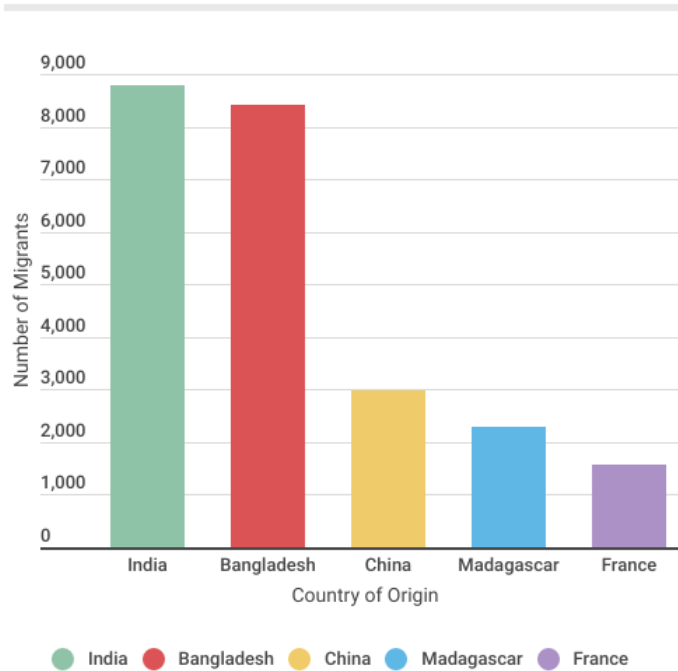
Migrant and Other Vulnerable Populations

Mauritius historically has seen negative net migration every year since 1988.²⁰ Just over two percent of Mauritians were migrants in 2015.²¹ Mauritius had 10 refugees in 2021, a decline



from 2020, when it had 20.²² The largest source countries for migrants are India and Bangladesh, followed by China, Madagascar, and France in 2022.²³

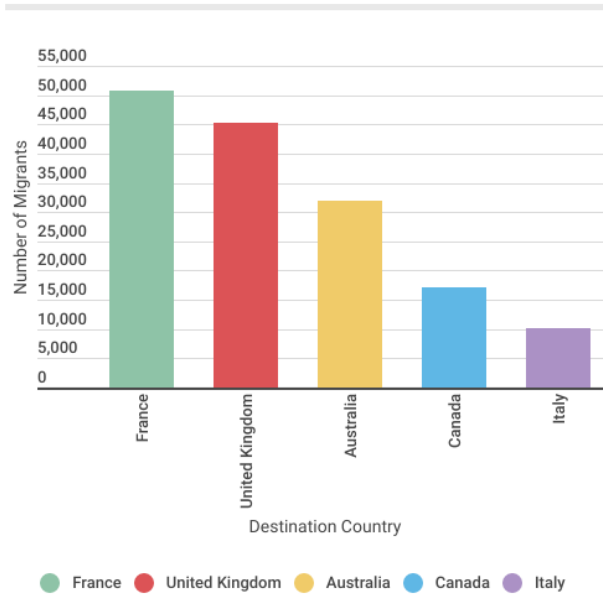
Migrants to Mauritius (2020)



In 2020, the most common destination countries for emigrants from Mauritius were the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Canada, and Italy.²⁴



Migrants from Mauritius (2020)

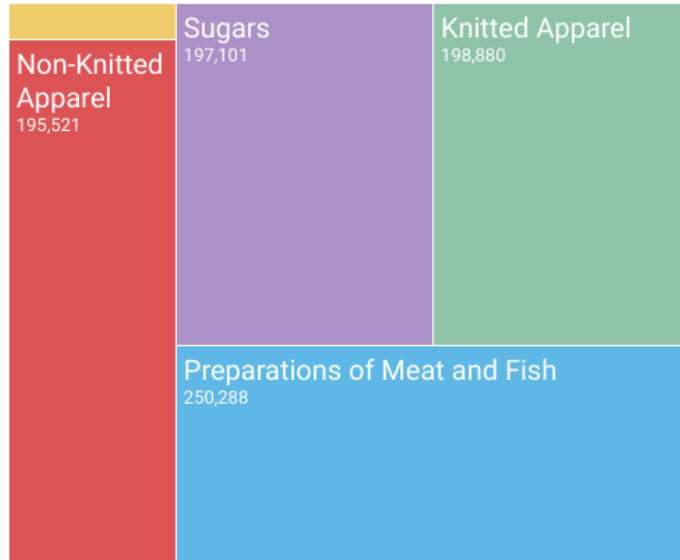


Exports and Trade

Mauritius' top exports in 2022 were apparel, fish, and sugar.²⁵ Sugarcane is grown on close to 90 percent of the cultivated land in the country, though Mauritian sugar output has decreased in recent years.²⁶

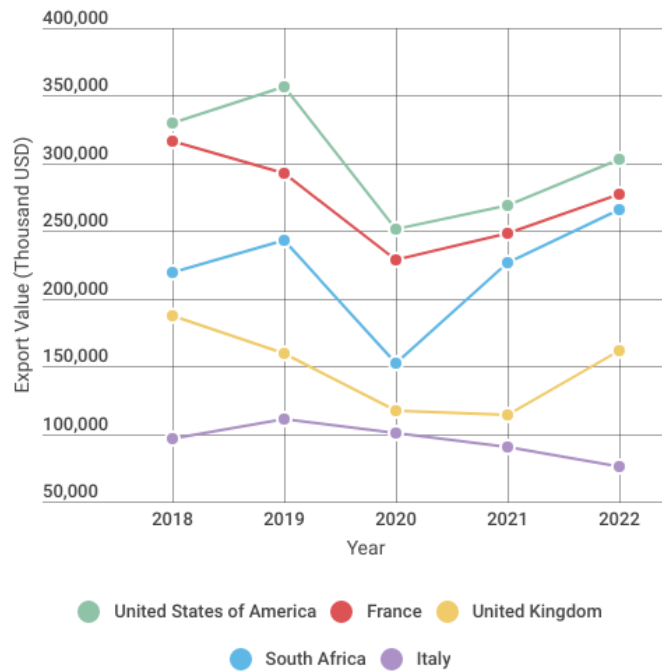


Top Commodity Exports 2022 (USD/Thousands)



The top importers of all goods from Mauritius in 2022 include the United States, France, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Italy.²⁷

Mauritius Top Export Partners



Mauritius' principal exports to the United States include apparel, sugar, and live animals, with a total export volume of USD 132 million in 2022. In 2014, the last year for which data was available, U.S. foreign direct investment in Mauritius was USD 7.8 billion.²⁸

Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors Analysis

Legal/Policy Factors

Level of Legal Protection for Civil Liberties and Workers' Rights

Freedom of Association

The law provides for the rights of workers (with exceptions for police, the Special Mobile Force, and government service members) to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and execute legal strikes. Foreign workers and employees in the export-oriented enterprises (EOE) are included in these rights. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) reports that there are “undue, unreasonable or unjustified prerequisites” to strike in Mauritius, including that no strike can be legally conducted when Parliament is in session.²⁹ In addition, the ITUC deems the list of sectors that must maintain minimum service provision during strikes to be excessive.³⁰ A COVID-19 act passed in 2020, and still in effect in 2023, limited the right to unionize for essential workers, who tend to be disproportionately lower-income.³¹ According to the U.S. Department of State, workers' freedom of association rights are effectively enforced by the government; however, antiunion discrimination is an issue in the private sector.³² One-quarter of Mauritius' workforce are union members, and Mauritius has not seen a major strike since 1979.³³

Working Conditions

Mauritius' universal minimum wage is MUR 10,575 (246 USD) per month.³⁴ A landmark 2019 labor rights act gave workers the right for retirement funds, severance after termination, harmonization of working conditions across different sectors (previously EOE's were more loosely regulated than other industries), and expanded anti-discrimination statutes.³⁵ Mauritius is an active member of the International Labor Organization (ILO).³⁶ However, growing unemployment threatens to bolster Mauritius' informal sector.

The legal workweek in Mauritius is 45 hours, and compulsory overtime is prohibited.³⁷ Nonetheless, Mauritian labor groups claim that overtime is required by some export-oriented enterprises.³⁸ The government sets up standards for workplace safety and workers have the legal right to remove themselves from a dangerous work setting.³⁹ However, employers do not always comply with safety laws, and in 2022 there were 34 industrial accidents.⁴⁰



Discrimination

The law prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, gender, disability, sexual orientation, HIV-positive status and the status of other communicable diseases, social status, religion, political opinion, and national origin, but the U.S. Department of State has reported that these laws are not effectively enforced and that discrimination occurs in practice, especially occupational discrimination with respect to gender, race, disability, and HIV status.⁴¹ Members of minority groups, particularly the Creole population, still allege discrimination in the workplace. Although de facto discrimination persists in workplace and social settings, the government has taken steps to reduce discrimination in the workplace and the courtroom.⁴²

Forced Labor

The law prohibits forced labor. However, imprisonment with compulsory prison labor is prescribed by the Merchant Shipping Act for seafarers who disobey an order or neglect a duty.⁴³ Despite laws against the practice, employers in many industries withhold the passports of migrant laborers, making it more difficult for migrant workers to leave exploitative work conditions.⁴⁴ The U.S. Department of State reports that the government has not met the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but that it is making significant efforts to do so.⁴⁵

Child Labor

The law sets the legal minimum working age at 16. Children under 18 years old are prohibited from working in hazardous occupations. The U.S. Department of State has reported that the government does not effectively enforce child labor laws and that child labor still occurs in many industries, notably in construction and in the service industry such as restaurants. Child labor is also common in the informal sector, where children are exploited for begging, street vending, and domestic servitude.⁴⁶ Education is compulsory until age 16, and most children complete primary education.⁴⁷

Civil Society Organizations

Domestic and international human rights groups reportedly operate without government restriction. However, many rely on government funding, potentially compromising their independence.⁴⁸ The U.S. Department of State reports that rights to freedom of speech and press are not always respected by the government, as the media regulatory agency's sanctions disproportionately affect opposition groups.⁴⁹ Independent media are active in the country, but face restrictions due in part to the fact that the government owns the only domestic television network, which generally supports the government's viewpoints.⁵⁰

Ratification of ILO Conventions Related to Human Trafficking or Rights of Workers and Migrants



Conventions	Status
ILO 29 Forced Labor	In force
ILO 87 Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize	In force
ILO 98 Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining	In force
ILO 100 Equal Remuneration	In force
ILO 105 Abolition of Forced Labor	In force
ILO 111 Discrimination	In force
ILO 138 Minimum Age	In force
ILO 181 Private Employment Agencies	Not ratified
ILO 182 Worst Forms of Child Labor	In force
ILO 97 Migration for Employment	In force

Use of Export Processing Zones (EPZs)

Mauritius does have export-oriented enterprise (EOEs), which enjoyed greater regulatory freedom in the past. Today these industries, which qualify as EOE by exporting most of or all their products, receive tax and customs exemptions in Mauritius.⁵¹ However, Mauritius standardized its labor practices in 2019, meaning EOE face the same labor regulations as other industries. Mauritius now uses EOE to promote and subsidize export industries and allow for preferential trading deals, which are key to Mauritius’ economic success.⁵²

Political Risk Factors

Political Instability or Conflict

Mauritius scores a 38.0 in the 2023 Fragile States Index, which ranks countries from 0 (highly stable) to 120 (highly volatile). Mauritius’ score of 38.0 places it in the “stable” category, and continues a decade-long decrease of Mauritius score.⁵³ India and Bangladesh, the two top sending countries for migrants to Mauritius, are both in the “warning” category.⁵⁴

Mauritius’ percentile rank for political stability and absence of violence/terrorism was 75.0, on the World Bank’s 2021 *Worldwide Governance Indicators Report*, meaning Mauritius experienced less violence than 75 percent of countries.⁵⁵

Level of Crime and Violence

Violent crime is low in Mauritius. The World Economic Forum’s *Global Competitiveness Report* ranks Mauritius at 43 out of 138 and 22 out of 138 for business costs of crime and violence and organized crime respectively, where a rank of one means that businesses face the lowest cost from crime.⁵⁶



Level of Corruption

The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) scores Mauritius as a 50 out of 100, where 0 signals “Highly Corrupt” and 100 signals “Very Clean.” Per the CPI, Mauritius is ranked 57 out of 180 countries.⁵⁷ There were multiple corruption scandals in 2015, one of which led to the arrest of former Prime Minister Ramgoolam on allegations of money laundering and conspiracy, and in 2017, President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim resigned after a financial scandal.⁵⁸ Despite recent efforts to combat corruption, officials are able to engage in corrupt practices with relative impunity.⁵⁹ Mauritius’ percentile rank for control of corruption was 66.8 and its rule of law percentile rank was 78.4 on the World Bank’s 2021 Worldwide Governance Indicators report, which ranks Mauritius ahead of over three-quarters of world countries based on a score measuring regulatory quality, rule of law, corruption, and government effectiveness.⁶⁰

Socio-Economic Risk Factors

Level of National Economic Development

Mauritius is scored in the high human development category, according to the UN Human Development Index, with a rank of 63 out of 191 countries and a score of 0.802.⁶¹ The country scores higher than the average for countries in the high human development group and for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁶² Bangladesh and India, the two top sending countries for migrants to Mauritius, are in the medium human development category with ranks of 129 and 132 respectively.⁶³

Level and Extent of Poverty

Mauritius has a low level of poverty, with only 0.1 percent of the population living below USD 2.15 per day in 2017.⁶⁴ When adjusted for inequality, the Human Development Index score falls from 0.802 to 0.666.⁶⁵ Mauritius’ gross national income (GNI) per capita was USD 9,840.7 in 2021, a slight increase from USD 9,533.1 in 2020.⁶⁶ The country’s GNI has generally trended in the positive direction over time.

Degree of Gender Inequality

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index ranks Mauritius at .347 in 2021, with 0 being the most equal and 1 being the most unequal. This rank marks Mauritius as the most equal country in Sub-Saharan Africa and places it at 63 out of 159 countries in 2021.⁶⁷ In 2022, the World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report* ranked Mauritius 105 out of 146.⁶⁸



Men and women enjoy the same legal status, yet cultural barriers persist. Under Mauritian law, women have access to education, employment, housing, government services, and credit. Women can inherit land and manage their own businesses. Sex and gender are both protected from discrimination under labor law. The law mandates equal pay for equal work as well.⁶⁹ In practice, however, women are paid less than men for similar work in the private sector.⁷⁰ Women also make up fewer decision-making positions in the private sector and are rarely found on corporate boards, with most women employed in low-wage jobs.⁷¹ Fifty-one percent of women are in the labor force compared to 81 percent of men. Women hold under 20 percent of parliamentary seats.⁷² Despite gender-based disparities being present in the workforce, women have higher education levels than men, with 56.6 percent of students in tertiary education being female as of 2019.⁷³

Rape and domestic violence are prohibited by law. However, rape and domestic violence are widespread in Mauritius and the police and judiciary do not effectively enforce the law. Spousal rape is also not explicitly criminalized. The law prohibits sexual harassment as well, but the government is ineffective in enforcing this prohibition and it has continued to be a problem.⁷⁴

Environmental Factors

Due to Mauritius being an island nation, and being economically dependent on marine life, environmental degradation and disasters threaten Mauritius' stability. Off-shore commercial fishing, water pollution, and reef degradation contribute to depletion of fish stocks.⁷⁵ Mauritius is surrounded by reefs, creating maritime hazards. In 2020, a Japanese-owned bulk carrier ran into a coral reef, spilling a thousand metric tons of oil in a Mauritian lagoon.⁷⁶

Sea-level rise due to climate change threatens Mauritius because it is an island. Storms and sea level rise threaten key industries but also pose an existential threat to the island's inhabitants. Climate change also threatens Mauritius' agricultural economy. The country experiences cyclones which will likely increase in frequency and intensity from climate change.⁷⁷ Mauritius' agricultural output. A temperature increase of two degrees would decrease sugar production by as much as half.⁷⁸

Documented Trafficking Risk in Key Commodity Supply Chains

Sugar

Sugar Overview

Most Mauritian sugar exports go to the European Union, a remnant of the preferential trade agreements established between the EU and Mauritius in previous years.⁷⁹ Mauritius exports a growing quantity of sugar to China. The sugar industry represents a significant but declining proportion of



Mauritius' GDP.⁸⁰ Approximately 30,000 small-scale farmers grow approximately 35 percent of the raw sugar cultivated in Mauritius.⁸¹

Documented TIP Risks in Sugar

Despite widespread mechanization, a significant proportion of sugarcane is still harvested manually in Mauritius. Cane cutters in Mauritius face similar health risks as cane cutters in other countries, including those related to exhaustion, long hours in the sun, and exposure to pesticides and dangerous wildlife.⁸²

Many migrants on sugar plantations in Mauritius work under short-term contracts and are not free to leave their workplace due to passport retention.⁸³

Apparel Manufacturing

Apparel Manufacturing Overview

Textile or apparel manufacturing is the largest industry in Mauritius, accounting for approximately 53 percent of exports in 2022.⁸⁴ According to the Mauritian government, there are currently about 225 textile manufacturing companies on the island. The main destinations for Mauritian textiles are the European Union, the United States, and South Africa.⁸⁵

Documented TIP Risks in Apparel Manufacturing

According to the U.S. Department of State, there are 35,550 migrant workers in the manufacturing and construction sectors from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, China and Madagascar, some of whom are subjected to forced labor.⁸⁶ Migrant workers to Mauritius typically secure their employment via third-party labor brokers, leaving them with recruitment-related debt.⁸⁷ Workers in the garment industry are often paid by the amount they produce which creates an incentive to work dangerously long hours. Working extra hours is reported to be optional and many migrants report that they are willing to work these hours, as wages tend to be higher than in their country of origin, but lower than the wages that local Mauritians earn. Local Mauritians are reported to be unwilling to work for the going wage rates in the industry and do not want short-term contracts (most contracts last only four months) which are common.⁸⁸

Fish

Fish Overview



The Mauritian fishing sector includes artisanal fishing and commercial offshore fishing. Foreign vessels, including Thai vessels, fish both legally and illegally in Mauritius' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) waters.⁸⁹

Documented TIP Risks in Fish

No domestic Mauritian fishing enterprises have been linked to forced labor or human trafficking.⁹⁰ However, foreign fleets fishing in Mauritius' EEZ have been found to use forced labor. Trafficked Cambodian workers have been identified on offshore commercial fishing vessels.⁹¹ These waters are reportedly not effectively monitored. Some migrants had to pay as much as USD 1,500 for seafood processing jobs in Mauritius, putting these workers at risk of debt bondage.⁹²



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