



Migration profile

MAURITIUS

A. Executive Summary

Mauritius is an archipelagic country located in the Indian Ocean. It has a volcanic origin, and coralline reefs currently surround it. Its tropical climate is characterised by uniform temperature throughout the year, between 19 and 23 degrees Celsius.

The Republic of Mauritius gained its independence in 1968.ⁱ It is both a country of origin and destination for international migration. Most of the immigrants are Indian, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Malagasy, and French.ⁱⁱ The country also hosts refugees and asylum seekers; in 2022, their main countries of origin were South Africa and Pakistan.ⁱⁱⁱ However, Mauritius is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol.^{iv}

Regarding emigration, in 2019 the main destination countries were France, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and South Africa.^v There are concerns about brain drain in the country,^{vi} and the government has launched the “Mauritian Diaspora Scheme” in order to promote the emigrants’ return into the country.^{vii}

Mauritius’ economic recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic has been determined by tourism development and the government’s successful vaccination campaign.^{viii} However, sharp increases in food and fuel prices have pushed inflation, and the country also faces serious problems concerning climate change.^{ix} In fact, in 2020 there were 113 forced internal displacements recorded due to storms and wet mass movement.^x

In 2021, Mauritius’ GDP amounted to US\$ 11,529,042,670^{xi} experiencing an annual growth rate of 3.7% in comparison to the decrease of -14.6 registered in 2020, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic.^{xii} Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows represented 2.2% of the country’s GDP,^{xiii} while the inflation rate was 4% of its GDP, compared to 2.6% in the previous year.^{xiv}

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Mauritius is an island country located in the Indian Ocean, off the southeast coast of Africa and east to Madagascar.^{xv} It includes the main island (Mauritius, part of the Mascarene Islands),^{xvi} several outer islands (Rodrigues, Agaléga, and Saint Brandon), and 22 islets (Saint Brandon).^{xvii} The country is divided into nine districts (Black River, Flacq, Grand Port, Moka, Pamplemousses, Plaines Wilhems, Port Louis, Riviere du Rempart, Savanne) and three dependencies (Agalega Islands, Cargados Carajos, and Rodrigues).^{xviii}

Mauritius occupies an area of 2,040 sq. km and has a population of 1,300,557.^{xix} Its capital city, Port Louis, has 155,226 inhabitants.^{xx} Other important cities are Beau Bassin - Rose Hill, Vacoas-Phoenix, Curepipe, and Quatre Bornes.^{xxi}

Although English is the official language, very few people speak it. Creole (a French-based *patois*) is the native and most common language, while French and Bhojpuri (Indo-Aryan) are spoken by a small percentage of the population. Other languages include Hindi, Chinese, Marathi, Tamil, Terungu, and Urdu.^{xxii}

Regarding religion, about half of the population is Hindu, and one-third is Christian (mostly Catholics), followed by Muslims, Buddhists, or other non-religious people.^{xxiii} There are various ethnic groups: Indo-Mauritian (roughly two-thirds of the population), Creole, Sino-Mauritian, and Franco-Mauritian.^{xxiv}

II. International and Internal Migration

In 2020, the total number of immigrants in Mauritius was 28,893. 56.49% of them were men, whereas the remaining 44.61% were female. Indians and Bangladeshi were the main foreign groups in the archipelago, accounting respectively for 30.38% and 29.12% of the total number of immigrants. Other important nationalities present in Mauritius included Chinese (10.32%), Malagasy (7.96%), and French (5.26%).^{xxv}

Internal migration between 2006 and 2011 concerned 8.1% of the whole population.^{xxvi} The Mauritius island concentrates the highest economic activities in Port Louis, the capital city. In the past, a large portion of the population was involved in the sugar cane and fishing industries. However, the rapid urbanisation of Quatre Bornes, located 15 km from Port Louis, has attracted many internal migrants. Other migrants looking for jobs in the tourism sector are moving to the west, north-west, north-east, and south of the Mauritius island.^{xxvii}

In addition, the local Government has developed several initiatives to attract highly skilled Mauritians living overseas to return and invest in the country. These advantages include, for instance, tax reductions and exemptions from custom fees. Furthermore, the Government has also made efforts to attract retirees who are first or second-generation migrants.^{xxviii}

Many French immigrants provide developmental and technical assistance since the French government and private contractors have highly invested for decades in the computerisation of the government ministries, as well as other activities such as road feasibility studies, highway maintenance, and cannery constructions. Moreover, the French government is involved in teaching language courses by establishing educational institutions in Mauritius.^{xxix}

Indian experts have also assisted in building civilian infrastructures, in health, science, and information technology, as well as the development of financial services. Educational institutions such as the Mahatma Gandhi Institute work to promote Indian culture.

Since the end of the 19th century, Mauritius has even become an important hub for the Chinese diaspora. They were mainly Cantonese, Fujianese, and Hakka interested in trade activities. Over the past decades, Chinese aid programs and diplomatic relations have contributed to the new wave of Chinese immigration to Mauritius.^{xxx} As a result, there is a large number of immigrants working for state-owned corporations, as well as government-sponsored projects in infrastructure construction, mining, telecommunications, and other agro-industrial

projects. In addition, many of them run private businesses in the construction sector, and culture exchanges are promoted through institutions like the Chinese Cultural Centre.^{xxxii}

In 2022, IOM urged the Government of Mauritius to cooperate in creating a harmonised database for migration, collected by different institutions. The organisation has highlighted the lack of updated and orderly data collection; in fact, the latest reliable resource goes back to the 2011 census.^{xxxiii} The local Government also conducts a yearly report, the Multipurpose Household Survey. In 2021, labour statistics reported that only 6,100 immigrant women were working, compared to 24,000 men in the same year. Despite that, there is no official data analysing the percentage of immigrant workers per sector, nor an unemployment analysis based on the immigrant population in the archipelago.^{xxxiii}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to the United Nations, in 2019 there were 188,406 Mauritian emigrants recorded abroad.^{xxxiv} The main destination countries were France (48,820), the United Kingdom (48,766), Australia (31,380), Canada (16,933), and South Africa (14,883).^{xxxv} Due to historical reasons, the Mauritian diaspora is found in the United Kingdom, France, and Australia. Then, emigration continued to rise in other countries like Canada for skilled and high-skilled workers, as well as students.^{xxxvi}

The districts with the highest migration rate in Mauritius are Port-Louis, Moka, and Black River.^{xxxvii} Citizens usually move out of the country looking for jobs, and many have returned after their retirement.^{xxxviii} Nevertheless, very little information is available on Mauritians' international emigration and return to the country.^{xxxix} Moreover, the Mauritian migrant flow may lead to brain drain if not properly assessed.^{xl} Gaps in the skills between tertiary-level education and the job market are one of the root causes of unemployment in the country.^{xli} Furthermore, the lack of economic opportunities is a real barrier for diaspora's returnees.^{xlii}

Thus, the government has developed policies for circular migration and encouraged the "brain circulation" of Mauritians emigrating. To attract the Diaspora back into the country and stimulate economic development, it has launched the "Mauritian Diaspora Scheme", providing those who return to work in Mauritius with advantages like permanent residence and tax exemptions.^{xliii} Furthermore, the Mauritian Diaspora Research Funding Scheme (MDRFS) aims to bring in experts from the diaspora to promote research or teaching programmes.^{xliv} Mauritians have the right to vote in national elections when residing abroad.^{xlvi}

Remittances positively affect the household income in Mauritius. They are primarily used for families' daily expenses in the country of origin, home construction or improvement, medical care and children's education.^{xlvi} In 2021 the personal remittances received represented 2.4% of Mauritius' GDP.^{xlvii}

IV. Forced Migrants (Internally Displaced Persons, Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Climate Displaced Persons)

In 2022, 10 persons with refugee status were registered in Mauritius. 5 of them came from South Africa, and 5 from Pakistan^{xlviii} under the UNHCR's mandate.^{xlix}

Mauritius is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 protocol.¹ It has neither national legislation on asylum nor procedures establishing rights and guarantees for asylum seekers and refugees.^{li lli}

In 2022, 202 refugees coming from Mauritius and 378 asylum seekers were registered in other countries.^{liii} Their main countries of destination were the United Kingdom (32%), Australia (25%), France (11%), Ireland (9%), and Italy (5%).^{liv} In 2020, 113 forced internal displacements were recorded in Mauritius because of storms and wet mass movement.^{lv}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Mauritius is Tier 2 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, which means that although it does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, it is making significant efforts to do so. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in the country. Peers, family members or business owners offering employment force girls into child sex trafficking. Taxi drivers also escort victims to traffickers and engage in commercial sex acts. Girls from poor neighbourhoods are especially vulnerable to sex trafficking. Guesthouse owners exploit Malagasy women recruited through fraudulent employment offers or tourism. They are also victims of forced labour in domestic servitude and sex trafficking in the Middle East. Child sex trafficking may take place on Rodrigues Island. Furthermore, traffickers with criminal networks in Russia and Kazakhstan recruit Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian women to move to Mauritius using marriage agencies and then exploit them in sex trafficking. Migrant workers from Bangladesh, India, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are also subject to forced labour. Moreover, employers in Mauritius retain migrant workers' passports to prevent them from changing jobs and expose them to forced labour.^{lvi}

In 2021, the government initiated 4 investigations against 7 suspects (1 adult sex trafficking and 3 child sex trafficking cases). Authorities also prosecuted a person involved in a 2014 sex trafficking case. At least 21 investigations and 17 prosecutions remained ongoing from previous years. It convicted 2 traffickers in 3 cases. 1 trafficker was sentenced for adult sex trafficking, and another in 2 separate child sex trafficking cases. The Mauritius Police Force maintained an *ad hoc* internal coordination committee to combat trafficking. It also provided anti-trafficking courses to law enforcement officers through the Police Training School. In 2021 the government identified 6 potential victims (all from sex trafficking), 5 were Mauritian nationals and 1 from Bangladesh.^{lvii}

In 2021, the government continued to operate a shelter for female child sex trafficking victims (with a capacity of 32 children). 23 children were provided with services. NGOs also offered shelter, medical assistance, and psychological services to adult victims. Migrant workers could access a "special open permit" to continue working in the country during ongoing trafficking investigations. The Government also held awareness campaigns targeting frontline workers, migrant workers, and local committees. Upon the arrival of foreign migrants, the Ministry of Labour informed them of their rights and relevant documents in their native language. Mauritius also reconvened the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Trafficking in Persons (IMCTIP) after being inactive for over two years, which coordinates daily operations in anti-trafficking efforts.^{lviii}

Despite the efforts made so far, the country still faces some challenges. The pandemic limited the government's capacity to combat human trafficking, and the length of the judicial process

(lasting for years) sometimes dissuaded victims from seeking legal redress through civil lawsuits. Standard identification and referral procedures for trafficking victims were only available for children. Officials did not investigate or prosecute traffickers exploiting individuals in forced labour, nor did they identify any victims of forced labour. They also did not make any effort to reduce the demand for commercial sex acts.^{lix}

VI. National Legal Framework

Mauritius' national migration strategy is defined in the 2018 National Migration and Development Policy, which is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 10.^{lx}

In 2019, the Government amended the 1970 Immigration Act and repealed Sections 8 (1)(a) and 8 (1).^{lxi} The Immigration Act and the 1970 Non-citizens (Employment Restriction) Act regulate immigration and outline employment rules for non-citizens.^{lxii} The government revised eligibility criteria to obtain a work permit as an investor, someone self-employed, or a professional.^{lxiii}

The 1969 Passport Act and the 2012 Passport Regulation Amendment handle the issue of passports and visas to national citizens.^{lxiv} The 1968 Deportation Act regulates the procedures for deporting a convicted person, an "undesirable" person, a destitute person, or an unwanted immigrant.^{lxv} The Citizenship Act manages the eligibility and procedures for the acquisition and loss of Mauritian citizenship.^{lxvi}

All workers, including migrants, are protected against discrimination by the 2019 Workers' Rights Act, which states that "an agreement shall not be terminated by an employer because of a worker's race, colour, caste, national extraction, social origin, place of his origin, age, pregnancy, religion, political opinion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, HIV status, impairment, marital status or family responsibilities."^{lxvii} In addition, the 2008 Equal Opportunities Act protects against direct and indirect discrimination based on a person's status, which includes, among other things, ethnic origin, place of birth, colour, sex, and race.^{lxviii} Furthermore, the 1968 Constitution of Mauritius upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination for all.^{lxix}

The Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009) criminalises sex and labour trafficking of adults and children. It also provides legal principles for the protection of migrants who are victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. In May 2019, the government built a shelter for adult migrants who are victims of human trafficking, with proper amenities, as well as facilities and support services.^{lxx}

The government has also enacted the Children's Court Act, which ensures a child-friendly environment during court proceedings and established a Criminal Division with jurisdiction over sexual offences against children.^{lxxi} In addition, the government enacted the Child Sex Offender Register Act, by creating the Child Sex Offender Register that will assist in monitoring, tracking, and investigating sexual offences against children.^{lxxii}

Mauritius has not acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (hereinafter jointly referred to as the 1951 Convention).^{lxxiii} Mauritius has also not acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (hereinafter referred to as the 1954 Convention) and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (hereinafter referred to as the 1961 Convention).^{lxxiv} Mauritius has neither a national legislative

framework on asylum, nor any laws or procedures which clearly establish the rights and safeguards to which asylum-seekers and refugees are entitled.^{lxxv}

On September 10, 1969 Mauritius signed but has yet to ratify the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, commonly referred to as the OAU Convention.^{lxxvi}

Mauritius also ratified the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families. In addition, two Protocols relevant to international migration supplement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime, namely the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the 2000 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air.^{lxxvii}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Ministry of Defense and Home Affairs Division secures the borders of Mauritius, prevents abuse of immigration and citizenship laws, and manages migration.^{lxxviii} The Ministry is also responsible for the issue of residence permits and visas and the management of the Passport and Immigration Office.^{lxxix}

The Passport and Immigration Office is a branch of the Mauritius Police Force and works under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office and the Commissioner of Police.^{lxxx} This Office is the sole authority in Mauritius, which is empowered to provide Passport & Immigration Services, process applications for visa to non-citizens who require an entry permit prior to travel to Mauritius, issue residence permit and occupation permit to eligible non-citizens who want to work, invest, or retire in Mauritius.^{lxxxi}

The Mauritius Police Force (MPF) maintains an *ad hoc* internal coordination committee to combat trafficking, as well as a "human rights desk," with two police officers trained on trafficking crimes that serve as a resource for other police units.^{lxxxii} The Mauritius Police Training School continues to provide anti-trafficking courses to new law enforcement officers and trafficking-specific training modules to mid-level officers.^{lxxxiii}

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade is under the administration of the Secretary for Foreign Affairs. It is currently working on general migration consultations and visa and trade policy information.^{lxxxiv}

International Organisations

The UNHCR's South Africa Multi-Country Office (SAMCO) serves nine countries: Botswana, Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, and South Africa.^{lxxxv} Since UNHCR has no presence in Mauritius, the country is part of the UNHCR Regional Representation for Southern Africa (ROSA) located in Pretoria, South Africa.^{lxxxvi} Currently, UNHCR does not have any information on the number of asylum-seekers, refugees or stateless persons in Mauritius in addition to those who contact UNHCR directly.^{lxxxvii}

The Republic of Mauritius became an IOM member state in June 2006 and signed a cooperation agreement with the organisation in September 2007.^{lxxxviii} Following this agreement, IOM opened up a Country Office in Port Louis, making it one of the very few UN

agencies with a permanent presence in Mauritius.^{lxxxix} The agency also serves as a liaison office with the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), with which IOM signed a cooperation agreement in November 2013, thus establishing a strong affiliation with the IOC General Secretariat based in Mauritius.^{xc}

IOM works to build the Capacity of the Mauritian Government to Strengthen the Linkages with the Mauritian Diaspora. It also contributes to a reduction in risks and threats posed by migration-related transnational organised maritime crime; it provides assistance to key national Governments and civil society's efforts in combating trafficking in persons in Comoros and Mauritius, through institutionalisation and implementation of national referral mechanisms.^{xcⁱ} IOM also operates a Canadian Visa Application Centre (CVAC) in Port Louis for visitor visas, study and work permits, as well as permanent resident cards from Mauritius.^{xcⁱⁱ}

UNICEF is also present in the region. Its Regional Office is located in Madagascar and is responsible for the countries of Comoros, Mauritius, and Seychelles.^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} UNICEF combats child labour in Mauritius, with children often subjected to the worst forms of forced labour, including commercial sex exploitation, sometimes because of human trafficking and illicit activities.^{xc^{iv}} Children are also employed in construction and street work.^{xc^v}

NGOs and Other Organisations

Anti-Slavery International is a UK international non-profit organisation with offices in Mauritius. Since 2020, the organisation has supported migrant workers from Bangladesh, Madagascar, and India whose labour rights have been denied to file grievances. Many of them have been successfully closed. Their advocacy work in Mauritius focuses especially on tackling forced labour in supply chains.^{xc^{vi}}

Recently, local platforms have emerged to raise awareness about labour exploitation in Mauritius. The Trade Union *Confédération des Travailleurs des Secteurs Publique et Privé* (CTSP) has established partnerships with Anti-Slavery International as well as private companies to create the Migrant Resource Centre (MRC). This centre provides immigrant workers with training sessions, as well as information about labour rights in different languages. The centre's resources include information available in English, French, Bangla, and Malagasy.^{xc^{vii}}

Moreover, the Construction Workers Union of Mauritius (CMWEU) has reported Indian migrant workers who had not been paid and were denied personal protective equipment while working in the construction sector.^{xc^{viii}}

There is no current policy granting refugee status or political asylum in Mauritius. For this reason, no organisation is offering assistance in this area of concern. However, the international organisation *Droits Humains Océan-Indien* (DIS-MOI), with headquarters in Mauritius, have launched awareness campaigns about human trafficking in Mauritius, Madagascar, Rodrigues, Réunion, and Agaléga.^{xc^{ix}}

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church of Mauritius is part of the Indian Ocean Bishops' Conference, which brings together the bishops of Comoros, Mauritius, La Réunion, Mayotte, and Seychelles.^c Its headquarters are in the city of Port Victoria, Seychelles. The Bishops' Conference is also a member of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).^{ci}

Caritas is a Catholic organisation whose work focuses on the rehabilitation of the poor, the marginalised, the excluded, and the repressed.^{cii} To this end, it has developed the following projects: the community support and development programme, the training programme, and the housing programme.^{ciii} It also has a network of centres in all the island regions (Port-Louis, Plaines Wilhems Bas, Ouest, Nord, Est, Plaines Wilhems Haut, Sud), where it provides services to those people most in need.^{civ}

February 2023

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- ⁱⁱ United Nations Population Division, 2020
- ⁱⁱⁱ UNHCR
- ^{iv} UNHCR, 2018
- ^v United Nations Population Division, 2019
- ^{vi} Ibid.
- ^{vii} Republic of Mauritius, 2023
- ^{viii} World Bank
- ^{ix} Ibid.
- ^x Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
- ^{xi} World Bank, 2021
- ^{xii} Ibid.
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- ^{xiv} Ibid.
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