

Government Policies and Programs to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor

In 2000, the Government of Mauritania began working with the ILO to raise awareness on worker rights, including child labor.²⁷⁹⁶ Key efforts to eradicate child labor have taken place that include the passage of a 2002 regulation prohibiting children from working in the streets of the capital city of Nouakchott,²⁷⁹⁷ and government-funded magazine and TV ads on child labor.²⁷⁹⁸ The government has also provided training to police and border guards on trafficking and human rights issues.²⁷⁹⁹

In 1999, the Government of Mauritania adopted its current educational plan, which is intended to run for 15 years and aims to provide all children with 10 years of basic schooling (elementary plus the first secondary level), followed by training opportunities tailored to the requirements of the labor market. New emphasis is being placed on pre-school education that prepares children for basic education and on creating incentives to encourage private investment to promote private education.²⁸⁰⁰ The goals for elementary school education are to achieve universal access by 2005, raise the retention rate from 55 percent to 78 percent by 2010, eliminate gender and regional disparities, improve the quality and relevance of education, and lower the pupil-teacher ratio.²⁸⁰¹ The government is currently implementing a school meals program designed to improve attendance and children's health. In addition, the Girls' School Enrollment Support Fund was created in 1997 as part of the government's Basic Education Department. The fund has conducted 13 multimedia campaigns aimed at increasing girls' attendance in five of the least-developed regions in Mauritania.²⁸⁰²

In June 2002, the Government of Mauritania became eligible to receive funding from the World Bank and other donors under the Education for All Fast Track Initiative, which aims to provide all children with a primary school education by the year 2015.²⁸⁰³ The World Bank is assisting the government to achieve education sector goals through a USD 49.2 million education loan project aimed at increasing enrollment, particularly among girls and in low-performing regions.²⁸⁰⁴ In 2000, the African Development Bank provided loan for a five-year education

²⁷⁹⁶ The government drafted a national plan on workers' rights, which led to recommendations by the ILO that the government conduct studies on the extent of the child labor problem and forced labor in Mauritania, due to the lack of available information on these subjects. In 2002, government officials reported that they were working with the ILO to plan the child labor study. Further information on the status of this study is not available. See Khaled Cheikhna, Director of Labor, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002. See also Dina, Secretary General, Union des Travailleurs de Mauritania, interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002.

²⁷⁹⁷ Moctar O. Hemeina, Official, U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²⁷⁹⁸ Dina, interview, August 15, 2002.

²⁷⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., June 11, 2003; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2003/21276.htm>.

²⁸⁰⁰ Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA), *Mauritania: Debt Relief Will Facilitate Implementation of the Ambitious Ten-Year Program for Education*, ADEA Newsletter, vol. 13, no. 2 (April-June 2001), 2001 [cited July 2, 2003]; available from <http://www.adeanet.org/newsletter/latest/06.html>.

²⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰² Government of Mauritania, *Written Replies by the Government of Mauritania Concerning the List of Issues Received by the Committee on the Rights of the Child Relating to the Consideration of the Initial Report of Mauritania*, CRC/C/Q/MAU/1, August 16, 2001, 11; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/replies/wr-mauritania-1.pdf>.

²⁸⁰³ World Bank, *World Bank Announces First Group Of Countries For 'Education For All' Fast Track*, press release, Washington, D.C., June 12, 2002; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/NEWS/0,,contentMDK:20049839~menuPK:34463~pagePK:34370~piPK:34424,00.html>.

²⁸⁰⁴ Souleymane Sow, Senior Operations Manager, World Bank, interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002. For a summary of other project components, see World Bank, *Education Sector Development Project*, [cited October 22, 2003]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?pagePK=104231&piPK=73230&theSitePK=40941&menuPK=228424&Projectid=P071308>.

sector improvement project, including the promotion of women's education and literacy, and increased government capacity.²⁸⁰⁵ In 2001, several UN agencies began implementation of a girls' education project that supports infrastructure development, gender-neutral curriculum development, and increased income-generation opportunities among the target population.²⁸⁰⁶

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2001, the ILO estimated that 21.7 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Mauritania were working.²⁸⁰⁷ Children traditionally work on family subsistence farms as a means of survival.²⁸⁰⁸ They also perform a wide range of other informal activities, such as working as cashiers,²⁸⁰⁹ street workers, dishwashers in restaurants, car washers, domestic workers, fishermen,²⁸¹⁰ herders, and apprentices in garages.²⁸¹¹ In addition, children living with marabouts, or Koranic teachers, assist with domestic work.²⁸¹² In 2002, there were two reported arrests of traffickers recruiting young boys to work in the Middle East as camel jockeys.²⁸¹³ Mauritania abolished slavery in 1981,²⁸¹⁴ however, due to the lack of economic and social opportunities for former slaves, their children are at risk of abject poverty,²⁸¹⁵ which may serve as an impetus for child labor.

In 2000, the gross primary enrollment rate was 83.0 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 64.0 percent.²⁸¹⁶ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Mauritania. In July 2001,²⁸¹⁷ the government announced that school attendance would become compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14.²⁸¹⁸ While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.²⁸¹⁹ Public school is free, but other costs such as books and lunches make education unaffordable for many poor children.²⁸²⁰ Ongoing challenges to the provision of quality education in Mauritania include the high dropout and repetition rates, a shortage of teachers, an inadequate curriculum,²⁸²¹ and poor national infrastructure which prevents children from traveling to and from schools.²⁸²²

²⁸⁰⁵ African Development Bank Group, *Project Information Sheet- Mauritania: Education Development Support Project*, [online] [cited July 2, 2003]; available from http://www.afdb.org/projects/projects/education_Mauritania.htm.

²⁸⁰⁶ Participating UN agencies include UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, WFP, UNAIDS and UNICEF. See Integrated Regional Information Networks, "Mauritania: Encouraging Girls to Go to School", IRINnews.org, [online], July 26, 2001 [cited July 2, 2003]; available from <http://irinnews.org/>.

²⁸⁰⁷ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2003.

²⁸⁰⁸ Dina, interview, August 15, 2002.

²⁸⁰⁹ Nahah, Secretary General, Confederation General des Travailleurs de Mauritanie, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²⁸¹⁰ Ely Samake, UNICEF official, interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002.

²⁸¹¹ Nahah, interview, August 14, 2002.

²⁸¹² Sow, interview, August 15, 2002.

²⁸¹³ U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Mauritania*.

²⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

²⁸¹⁵ Samory O. Beye, Secretary General, Confederation Libre des Travailleurs de Mauritanie, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²⁸¹⁶ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*.

²⁸¹⁷ UNDP, *Mauritania Helps Girls by Making Education Compulsory*, [online] 2001 [cited July 2, 2003]; available from <http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpagearchive/2001/july/25july01/index.html>.

²⁸¹⁸ The legislation establishes monitoring procedures and fines for offenders. See Government of Mauritania, *Written Replies to the Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 9.

²⁸¹⁹ For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

²⁸²⁰ Ely Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

²⁸²¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Mauritania, CRC/C/15/Add.159*, UN, Geneva, November 6, 2001, [cited July 2, 2003], para. 45; available from <http://www.unhchr.ch>.

²⁸²² Ely Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

An amendment to the Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 16 years.²⁸²³ The Labor Law also prohibits forced labor²⁸²⁴ and sets 18 years as the minimum age for work requiring excessive force, or that could harm the health, safety, or morals of children.²⁸²⁵ The Criminal Code, which follows Islamic criminal law, establishes strict penalties for engaging in prostitution or procuring prostitutes, ranging from fines to imprisonment for two to five years for cases involving minors.²⁸²⁶ Article 3 of the law against trafficking in persons, passed on July 17, 2003, expands the scope of trafficking for cases involving children.²⁸²⁷ In addition, the Criminal Code sets a penalty of 5 to 10 years' imprisonment for the use of fraud or violence to abduct minors.²⁸²⁸

According to the government, no cases of child labor have been reported.²⁸²⁹ However, the government reportedly lacks the resources to effectively monitor compliance with child labor laws.²⁸³⁰

The Government of Mauritania ratified ILO Convention 138 and ILO Convention 182 on December 3, 2001.²⁸³¹

²⁸²³ Government of Mauritania, *Written Replies to the Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 9.

²⁸²⁴ Government of Mauritania, *Code du Travail, 1963*, Loi N. 63.023, (January 1963), Livre I, Titre Premier, Article 3.

²⁸²⁵ *Ibid.*, Livre Deuxième, Article 47.

²⁸²⁶ *Criminal Code of Mauritania*, Articles 307-14, as cited in The Protection Project Legal Library; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/Mauritania.pdf>.

²⁸²⁷ U.S. Department of State, electronic communication to USDOL official, February 19, 2004.

²⁸²⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial reports of states parties due in 1993*, CRC/C/8/Add.42, prepared by Government of Mauritania, pursuant to Article 44 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, January 10, 2001, [cited July 2, 2003], para. 345; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/4ec6bda0d30ae362c1256a64002c7a85?0opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/4ec6bda0d30ae362c1256a64002c7a85?0opendocument). See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2003: Mauritania*.

²⁸²⁹ Cheikhna, interview, August 14, 2002.

²⁸³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2003, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18215.htm>.

²⁸³¹ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited July 2, 2003]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>.