

# Mauritania

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

The ILO estimated that 21.4 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Mauritania were working in 2002.<sup>2587</sup> In rural areas, children traditionally perform family tasks as a means of survival. Activities include farming, herding, and fishing.<sup>2588</sup> Children perform a wide range of urban informal activities, such as street work and domestic work, as well as work as cashiers,<sup>2589</sup> dishwashers in restaurants, car washers,<sup>2590</sup> and apprentices in garages.<sup>2591</sup> In addition, some children living with *marabouts*, or Koranic teachers, are forced to beg, sometimes for over 12 hours a day.<sup>2592</sup>

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14.<sup>2593</sup> In 2001, the gross primary enrollment rate was 86.5 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 66.7 percent.<sup>2594</sup> Gross and net enrollment ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2000, the gross primary school attendance rate was 92.8 percent and the net primary attendance rate was 60.6 percent.<sup>2595</sup> However, a lack of adequate school facilities and teachers, particularly in rural areas, is likely to impede the full realization of the government's goal of universal primary education in Mauritania until at least 2007.<sup>2596</sup>

Public school is free, but other costs such as books and lunches make education unaffordable for many poor children.<sup>2597</sup> Ongoing challenges to the provision of quality education in Mauritania include high

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<sup>2587</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2004.

<sup>2588</sup> 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, para. 327; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/4ec6bda0d30ae362cl256a64002c7a85?0opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/4ec6bda0d30ae362cl256a64002c7a85?0opendocument). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2003: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., February 25, 2004, Section 6d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/29677.htm>.

<sup>2589</sup> Nahah, Secretary General, Confederation General des Travailleurs de Mauritania, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

<sup>2590</sup> Ely Samake, UNICEF official, interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002.

<sup>2591</sup> Nahah, interview, August 14, 2002.

<sup>2592</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., June 14, 2004; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/33189.htm>.

<sup>2593</sup> The legislation establishes monitoring procedures and fines for offenders. See 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, 9; available from <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/replies/wr-mauritania-1.pdf>.

<sup>2594</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*.

<sup>2595</sup> USAID Development Indicators Service, *Global Education Database*, [online] 2004 [cited October 10, 2004]; available from <http://quesdb.cdie.org/ged/index.html>.

<sup>2596</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Mauritania*, Section 5.

<sup>2597</sup> Ely Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

dropout and repetition rates, inadequate curriculum,<sup>2598</sup> and a poor national infrastructure, which prevents children from traveling to and from schools.<sup>2599</sup> In 2002, a WFP survey of out-of-school children in Mauritania found that 25 percent did not attend school due to the need to support their families or perform domestic work, and another 22 percent did not attend due to the distance to school.<sup>2600</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The 2004 Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years, and defines what the government considers to be worst forms of child labor.<sup>2601</sup> The Labor Law also prohibits forced and compulsory labor<sup>2602</sup> and sets 18 years as the minimum age for work requiring excessive force, or that could harm the health, safety, or morals of children.<sup>2603</sup> The Criminal Code establishes strict penalties for engaging in prostitution or procuring prostitutes, ranging from fines to imprisonment for 2 to 5 years for cases involving minors.<sup>2604</sup> The Law Against Human Trafficking expands the scope of trafficking for cases involving children.<sup>2605</sup> Fines for violation of the law include 5 to 10 years of forced labor and a fine.<sup>2606</sup> In addition, the Criminal Code sets a penalty of 5 to 10 years' imprisonment for the use of fraud or violence to abduct minors.<sup>2607</sup>

The Ministry of Labor and Employment is the primary agency responsible for enforcing child labor laws and regulations. The Ministry has an institutional mechanism in place to receive child labor complaints. However, the labor inspectorate lacks the capacity to investigate and address potential violations due to a lack of resources. There are eight labor inspectors assigned to cover the entire country, and they are reported to lack adequate vehicles, telephones, and other requisite equipment.<sup>2608</sup>

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<sup>2598</sup> 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 May 21, 2004], para. 45; available from <http://www.unhchr.ch>.

<sup>2599</sup> Ely Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

<sup>2600</sup> World Food Program, *Country Programme- Mauritania (2003-2008)*, September 2, 2002, 8.

<sup>2601</sup> Worst forms of child labor are defined as all forms of slavery and child exploitation, activities that exceed the physical capacity of a child or can be considered degrading, work connected to trafficking in children, activities that require children to handle chemicals or dangerous materials, work on Fridays or holidays, and work outside of the country. Provisions establishing the minimum age for employment are found in Articles 153 and 154. See U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *unclassified telegram no. 1050*, August 4, 2004.

<sup>2602</sup> Government of Mauritania, *Code du Travail, 1963*, Loi N. 63.023, (January 1963).

<sup>2603</sup> *Ibid.*, Livre Deuxième, Article 47.

<sup>2604</sup> *Criminal Code of Mauritania*; available from <http://209.190.246.239/protectionproject/statutesPDF/Mauritania.pdf>.

<sup>2605</sup> U.S. Department of State, electronic communication to USDOL official, February 19, 2004. See also Government of Mauritania, *Public Comments to USDOL*, July 30, 2004.

<sup>2606</sup> Mauritania, *Public Comments*.

<sup>2607</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties: Mauritania*, [cited May 21, 2004], para. 345. See also 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>.

<sup>2608</sup> U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *unclassified telegram no. 1050*.

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

The Government of Mauritania held public awareness campaigns on radio, television and newspaper to publicize provisions in the new Labor Code and Law Against Human Trafficking.<sup>2609</sup> The government is also implementing a program aimed at increasing school attendance among street children.<sup>2610</sup>

Selected Child Labor Measures Adopted by Governments		
Ratified ILO Convention 138	12/3/2001	✓
Ratified ILO Convention 182	12/3/2001	✓
ILO-IPEC Member		
National Plan for Children		
National Child Labor Action Plan		
Sector Action Plan		

The Government of Mauritania continues to implement its current educational plan, adopted in 1999, which is intended to run for 15 years. The plan 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.<sup>2611</sup>

In 2004, the Government of Mauritania provided USD 20.2 million to match USD 16.1 million provided by donors under the Education For All Fast Track Initiative program. Efforts to promote access to quality education include the increased use of multi-grade classrooms, the provision of allowances for teachers in remote schools, and improvements in the teacher to student ratio.<sup>2612</sup> 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, among other activities.<sup>2613</sup> The government is also receiving funds from the African Development Bank for a 5-year education sector improvement project, including the promotion of girls' and women's education and literacy, and increased government capacity for education planning and management.<sup>2614</sup>

<sup>2609</sup> Ibid. See also U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2004: Mauritania*.

<sup>2610</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2003: Mauritania*, Section 5.

<sup>2611</sup> 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. 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. See 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 May 20, 2004]; available from <http://www.adeanet.org/newsletter/latest/06.html>.

<sup>2612</sup> 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 (FTI), which aims to provide all children with a primary school education by the year 2015. *Education for All (EFA) - Fast Track Initiative Progress Report*, International Monetary Fund and World Bank, March 26, 2004; available from [hard copy on file]. See also 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>.

<sup>2613</sup> 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 Program*, [cited May 19, 2004]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64027221&piPK=64027220&theSitePK=362340&menuPK=362372&Projectid=P071308>.

<sup>2614</sup> The program received funding in 2000. See African Development Bank Group, *Project Information Sheet- Mauritania: Education Development Support Project*, [online] [cited May 20, 2004]; available from [http://www.afdb.org/projects/projects/education\\_Mauritania.htm](http://www.afdb.org/projects/projects/education_Mauritania.htm).

WFP is implementing a school feeding program intended to increase school enrollment, particularly among girls.<sup>2615</sup> UNICEF is also supporting the government's education sector reforms, with a particular focus on adolescent girls' enrollment, improving parent and student associations, and assisting children who have never attended school or who have dropped out.<sup>2616</sup>

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<sup>2615</sup> World Food Program, *World Hunger - Mauritania*, [online] 2004 [cited May 20, 2004]; available from [http://www.wfp.org/country\\_brief/indexcountry.asp?country=478](http://www.wfp.org/country_brief/indexcountry.asp?country=478). See also World Food Program, *Country Programme-Mauritania*, pg. 3.

<sup>2616</sup> UNICEF, *At a Glance: Mauritania*, [online] 2004 [cited May 19, 2004]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mauritania.html>.