

Mauritania

<i>Selected Statistics and Indicators on Child Labor</i> ²¹⁹⁸	
Working children, 5-14 years (%):	-
Working boys, 5-14 years (%):	-
Working girls, 5-14 years (%):	-
Working children by sector, 5-14 years (%):	
- Agriculture	-
- Manufacturing	-
- Services	-
- Other	-
Minimum age for work:	14
Compulsory education age:	14
Free public education:	Yes*
Gross primary enrollment rate (%), 2005:	99
Net primary enrollment rate (%), 2005:	77
School attendance, children 5-14 years (%):	-
Survival rate to grade 5 (%), 2004:	53
ILO-IPEC participating country:	No
*Must pay for miscellaneous school expenses.	
**Accession.	

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In rural areas in Mauritania, children frequently work with their families in activities such as farming, herding, and fishing. Children perform a wide range of urban informal activities, such as domestic service, street vending, and driving donkey carts to collect garbage and deliver water and construction materials.²¹⁹⁹

In remote areas of the country where the economy continues to rely on traditional labor and barter arrangements, such as the practice of slavery and indentured servitude that have historically been utilized in Sahelian communities, children continued to be exploited in slave-like practices.²²⁰⁰

Girls as young as 7 years work as domestic servants in urban households, often without pay;²²⁰¹ some of these girls are victims of trafficking. Girls trafficked for domestic service come from within

Mauritania, and from Senegal and Mali. Within Mauritania, girls are also trafficked for sexual exploitation. Mauritanian boys are trafficked by religious leaders for begging as part of their religious instruction.²²⁰² The practice of sending boys to Koranic teachers to receive education is a tradition in various countries, including Mauritania. While many religious leaders, or *marabouts*, provide the boys with lessons, other *marabouts* force their boy students, or *talibés*, to beg for more than 12 hours per day without adequate food and shelter.²²⁰³ *Talibés* come from the Pulaar tribes of southern Mauritania,²²⁰⁴ but some are trafficked into Mauritania from Senegal and Mali.²²⁰⁵ Mauritanian boys are also trafficked by street gang leaders for begging and selling drugs, although the incidence of this problem is unknown.²²⁰⁶

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years unless the child has not yet completed the 9 years of compulsory education in which case the minimum working age may be raised.²²⁰⁷ At 12 years, children may perform light work in establishments where their family members are employed, provided that they have the Minister of Labor's authorization and maintain their schooling. However, 12-year-olds may not work more than 2 hours a day, with the total combined hours of school and work not to exceed 7 hours a day, and the work must not be harmful to their normal development.²²⁰⁸ Children under 14 years may not work on Fridays or public holidays, and children under 16 years are prohibited from night work.²²⁰⁹ The law also bans children under 18 years from work that is beyond their strength or is likely to harm their safety, health, or morals.²²¹⁰ Employers must maintain a registry of employed youths under 18 years, including hours worked.²²¹¹ Violation of Mauritania's child labor laws may result in a prison sentence of 15 days to 1 month and/or a fine.²²¹²

Mauritanian law defines the worst forms of child labor as all forms of slavery and exploitive work; work exceeding the physical capacity of a child or considered degrading; work connected to

trafficking in children; and activities requiring children to handle chemicals or dangerous materials; work on Fridays or holidays; and work outside the country.²²¹³ With parental consent, or failing that, with permission from the Minister of Defense, children may enlist voluntarily in the military at 16 years. While the law requires every citizen to register for military service at 17 years, there has no active military registration in recent years.²²¹⁴ Forced and compulsory labor and trafficking in persons are prohibited by law,²²¹⁵ with the penalty for the trafficking of children being forced labor for 5 to 10 years and a fine.²²¹⁶ In addition, the law establishes penalties for engaging in prostitution or procuring prostitutes, ranging from fines to imprisonment for 2 to 5 years for cases involving minors.²²¹⁷ In August 2007, the Government passed a law criminalizing slavery. Once it takes effect, the new law will provide penalties ranging from fines to between 5 and 10 years of imprisonment for offenders.²²¹⁸

Several government entities, including the Ministry of Labor, share responsibility for enforcing child labor laws. According to USDOS, the labor inspectorate lacked the necessary resources to enforce child labor laws, and did not investigate any child labor cases in 2007.²²¹⁹ According to USDOS, there were no prosecutions of trafficking cases in 2007.²²²⁰ Reports indicate that some local officials may have engaged in a cover-up of slavery cases by intimidating or providing material goods to victims in exchange for testimony that their living conditions were satisfactory.²²²¹

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

The Government of Mauritania continued to collaborate with UNICEF to provide domestic workers and former slaves with micro-credit programs. The Government worked with NGOs to implement a program to reduce the number of *talibés* and provide them with food and medical care.²²²² It also continued to fund six centers in the capital, Nouakchott, that care for indigent people, including many *talibés*, and established a welcome center for children who had been trafficked to the United Arab Emirates to work as camel jockeys.²²²³ The Government of Mauritania continues to participate in a USD 2.7 million program to return and reintegrate child camel jockeys to their home

countries, funded by the United Arab Emirates and implemented by UNICEF. As of June 2007, at least 21 former child camel jockeys from Mauritania have been returned home and provided with an education, and their families have been assisted with alternative income-generating activities under the program.²²²⁴

The Government's Commissariat for Social Protection and Humanitarian Assistance continued its efforts to combat child labor and human trafficking.²²²⁵ In December 2007, the President of Mauritania launched a national campaign to raise awareness and to eradicate all forms of slavery in the country, and committed an estimated USD 7.5 million to this effort.²²²⁶

²¹⁹⁸ For statistical data not cited here, see the Data Sources and Definitions section. For data on ratifications and ILO-IPEC membership, see the Executive Summary. For minimum age for admission to work, age to which education is compulsory, and free public education, see Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail, 2004*, Loi No. 2004-017, (July 2004), article 153. See also UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Written Replies by the Government of Mauritania Concerning the List of Issues CRC/C/Q/MAU/1*, prepared by Government of Mauritania, pursuant to Additional report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, August 16, 2001; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/replies/wr-mauritania-1.pdf>. See also U.S. Department of State, "Mauritania," in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2007*, Washington, DC, March 11, 2008, section 5; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007>.

²¹⁹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," section 6d. See also U.S. Embassy-Nouakchott, *reporting, November 30, 2007*, para 11.

²²⁰⁰ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania." See also US Department of State official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, July 20, 2008. See also ILO, *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labor*, Geneva, 2005, 42; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWE B.DOWNLOAD_BLOB?Var_DocumentID=5059.

²²⁰¹ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," section 5 and 6d.

²²⁰² U.S. Department of State, "Mauritania (Tier 2 Watch List)," in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2007*, Washington, DC, June 12, 2007; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/>.

²²⁰³ U.S. Embassy-Nouakchott, *reporting, November 30, 2007*, para 12. See also U.S. Department of State,

Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," sections 5 and 6d. See also Peter Easton, Mark Peach, Ibrahima Lalya Bah, ElHadj Bella Doumboula, and Mohammed Lamine Barry, *Research Studies Series no. 8*, International Working Group on Nonformal Education of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, May 1997; available from <http://www.adeanet.org/wgnfe/publications/abel/abel2.html>. See also Peter Easton, "Education and Koranic Literacy in West Africa," *IK Notes* no. 11 (August 1999), 1, 3; available from <http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ik/iknt11.pdf>.

²²⁰⁴ U.S. Embassy-Nouakchott, *reporting, November 30, 2007*, para 13.

²²⁰⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2007: Mauritania."

²²⁰⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Mauritania (Tier 2 Watch List)," in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2007*, Washington, DC, June 12, 2007; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2007/>.

²²⁰⁷ Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail, 2004*, article 153.

²²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, articles 153 and 154.

²²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, articles 155 and 164.

²²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, article 247. See also ILO NATLEX National Labor Law Database, *Arrêté no. 239 du 17 septembre 1954*, accessed October 11, 2006; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=MRT&p_classification=04&p_origin=COUNTRY&p_sortby=SORTBY_COUNTRY.

²²¹¹ Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail, 2004*, article 156.

²²¹² *Ibid.*, articles 449-450.

²²¹³ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, August 18, 2004*.

²²¹⁴ ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182) Mauritania (ratification: 2001)*, [online] 2005 [cited March 6, 2007]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>. See also U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, August 11, 2006. See Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Mauritania," in *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, London, 2004; available from http://www.child-soldiers.org/document_get.php?id=785.

²²¹⁵ Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail, 2004*,

article 5. See also ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Convention No. 182: Mauritania*.

²²¹⁶ Government of Mauritania, *Public Comments to USDOL*, July 30, 2004. See also ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Convention No. 182: Mauritania*.

²²¹⁷ Government of Mauritania, *Ordonnance 83-162 du 09 juillet 1983 portant institution d'un Code pénal*, (July 9, 1983); available from <http://www.droit-afrique.com/images/textes/Mauritanie/Mauritanie%20-%20Code%20penal.pdf>.

²²¹⁸ Integrated Regional Information Networks, *Mauritania: New Anti-Slavery Law Not Enough for Real Change, Activists Say*, IRINnews.org [online], August 24, 2007; available from <http://www.irinnews.org/PrintReport.aspx?ReportId=73936>. See also U.S. Embassy-Nouakchott, *reporting, November 30, 2007*, para 4.

²²¹⁹ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," section 6d. See also U.S. Embassy-Nouakchott, *reporting, November 30, 2007*, para 6.

²²²⁰ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," section 5.

²²²¹ U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2007: Mauritania."

²²²² U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," section 5.

²²²³ U.S. Department of State, "Trafficking in Persons Report- 2007: Mauritania."

²²²⁴ UNICEF, *Starting Over: Children Return Home from Camel Racing*, 2006, 5-6, 12-13; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/StartingOver.pdf>. See also UNICEF, "UAE Supports UNICEF in Safe Return of Camel Jockeys to Home Countries", [online], May 8, 2005 [cited December 9, 2007]; available from

http://www.unicef.org/media/media_26692.html. See also Isselmou, "Supporting the Repatriation of Child Camel Jockeys in Mauritania".

²²²⁵ Government of Mauritania official, Interview with USDOL official, March 10, 2008. See also Government of Mauritania official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, December 15, 2006.

²²²⁶ U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports- 2007: Mauritania," section 6c. See also US Department of State official, E-mail communication, July 20, 2008.