

# Mauritania

## Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

Statistics on the number of working children under age 15 in Mauritania are unavailable.<sup>2990</sup> In rural areas, children traditionally work with families in activities such as farming, herding, and fishing as a means of survival.<sup>2991</sup> Children perform a wide range of urban informal activities, such as street work and domestic work. They also work as cashiers,<sup>2992</sup> dishwashers in restaurants, car washers, and apprentices in garages.<sup>2993</sup> Child labor is one of many problems associated with poverty. In 2000, 25.9 percent of the population in Mauritania were living on less than USD 1 a day.<sup>2994</sup>

The government indicated to the ILO Committee of Experts that excessive physical demands sometimes made on children negatively affect their health.<sup>2995</sup> In addition, some children living with *marabouts*, or Koranic teachers, are forced to beg, sometimes for over 12 hours a day.<sup>2996</sup> Mauritania is also a source and destination country for trafficking in children for forced labor purposes.<sup>2997</sup>

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 14.<sup>2998</sup> In 2002, the gross primary enrollment rate was 88 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 68 percent.<sup>2999</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 1996, 41.8 percent of children ages 7 to 14 years were attending

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<sup>2990</sup> This statistic is not available from the data sources that are used in this report. Please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section of this report for information about sources used. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations noted that there is no reliable statistical data on the employment of children and the nature and number of contraventions in Mauritania. See Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, *CEACR: Individual Observation concerning Convention No. 138, Minimum Age, 1973 Mauritania (ratification: 2001)*, ILO Conference, 93rd Session, Geneva, 2005; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms, such as the use of children in the illegal drug trade, prostitution, pornography, and trafficking. As a result, statistics and information on children's work in general are reported in this section. Such statistics and information may or may not include the worst forms of child labor. For more information on the definition of working children and other indicators used in this report, please see the "Data Sources and Definitions" section.

<sup>2991</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.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/4ec6bda0d30ae362c1256a64002c7a85?0opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/4ec6bda0d30ae362c1256a64002c7a85?0opendocument). See also U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2004: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., February 28, 2005; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41615.htm>.

<sup>2992</sup> Nahah, Secretary General, Confederation General des Travailleurs de Mauritanie, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

<sup>2993</sup> Ely Samake, UNICEF official, interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002.

<sup>2994</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2005* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2005.

<sup>2995</sup> Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, *Individual Observation of the Committee of Experts*.

<sup>2996</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2005: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., June 14, 2005; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2005/46614.htm>.

<sup>2997</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Mauritania*, Section 5.

<sup>2998</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.unhcr.ch/html/menu2/6/crc/doc/replies/wr-mauritania-1.pdf>.

<sup>2999</sup> World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2004*.

school.<sup>3000</sup> As of 2001, 61 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.<sup>3001</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>3002</sup>

Public school is free, but other costs such as books and lunches make education unaffordable for many poor children.<sup>3003</sup> Ongoing challenges to the provision of quality education in Mauritania include high dropout and repetition rates, inadequate curriculum,<sup>3004</sup> and a poor national infrastructure that prevents children from traveling to and from school.<sup>3005</sup> In 2002, a World Food Program (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>3006</sup>

## Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

There are various statutes under which the worst forms of child labor can be prosecuted in Mauritania. 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>3007</sup> The Labor Law also prohibits forced and compulsory labor<sup>3008</sup> and sets 18 years as the minimum age for work requiring excessive force or work that could harm the health, safety, or morals of children.<sup>3009</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>3010</sup> Cases involving trafficking of children are addressed under the Law against Human Trafficking.<sup>3011</sup> Penalties for violations of this law include 5 to 10 years of forced labor and a fine.<sup>3012</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>3013</sup> With parental consent, or failing that, permission from the Minister of Defense, children may enlist voluntarily in the military at age 16; however, in practice, the military does not recruit minors. The law also requires every citizen at age 17 to register for military service, though there has been

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<sup>3000</sup> UCW analysis of ILO SIMPOC, UNICEF MICS, and World Bank surveys, *Child Economic Activity and School Attendance Rates*.

<sup>3001</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/TableViewer/tableViewer.asp?ReportId=55> (School life expectancy, % of repeaters, survival rates; accessed December 2005).

<sup>3002</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2004: Mauritania*, Section 5.

<sup>3003</sup> Ely Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

<sup>3004</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 June 15, 2005], para. 45; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch>.

<sup>3005</sup> Ely Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

<sup>3006</sup> World Food Program, *Country Programme- Mauritania (2003-2008)*, September 2, 2002, 8.

<sup>3007</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 also: U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting*, August 19, 2004.

<sup>3008</sup> Government of Mauritania, *Code du Travail*, 1963, Loi N. 63.023, (January 1963).

<sup>3009</sup> *Ibid.*, Livre Deuxième, Article 47.

<sup>3010</sup> *Criminal Code of Mauritania*; available from [hard copy on file].

<sup>3011</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>3012</sup> Mauritania, *Public Comments*.

<sup>3013</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Initial Reports of States Parties: Mauritania*, [cited June 15, 2005], 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>.

no active military registration since 1978.<sup>3014</sup> Since 1999, the Government of Mauritania has submitted to the ILO a list or an equivalent document identifying the types of work that it has determined are harmful to the health, safety or morals of children under Convention 182 or Convention 138.<sup>3015</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, according to the U.S. Department of State, 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>3016</sup>

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

The Government of Mauritania has established an inter-ministerial working group on trafficking composed of high-level representatives from the Ministries of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Labor, and Communications. The Government of Mauritania provided additional victim services in 2004 and 2005. It opened six centers to provide food, shelter and limited medical care to indigent people, including *talibes*, indigent boys who often become beggars. In 2004, a government-sponsored NGO began offering resources to *marabouts* to focus on educating their charges.<sup>3017</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>3018</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

<sup>3014</sup> ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182) Mauritania (ratification: 2001)*, [online] 2005 [cited August 21, 2006]; available from <http://webfusion.ilo.org/public/db/standards/normes/appl/index.cfm?lang=EN>. See U.S. Embassy-Nouakchott official, electronic communication to USDOL official, August 11, 2006. See Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *Mauritania*, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, [online] 2004 [cited October 3, 2005]; available from [http://www.child-soldiers.org/document\\_get.php?id=785](http://www.child-soldiers.org/document_get.php?id=785).

<sup>3015</sup> ILO-IPEC official, email communication to USDOL official, November 14, 2005.

<sup>3016</sup> U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting*.

<sup>3017</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2005: Mauritania*.

<sup>3018</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 June 15, 2005]; available from <http://www.adeanet.org/newsletter/latest/06.html>.

remote schools, and improvements in the teacher-to-student ratio.<sup>3019</sup> The World Bank is further 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>3020</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>3021</sup>

WFP is implementing a school feeding program intended to increase school enrollment, particularly among girls.<sup>3022</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>3023</sup>

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<sup>3019</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>3020</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 June 15, 2005]; available from <http://web.worldbank.org/external/default/main?pagePK=64027221&piPK=64027220&theSitePK=362340&menuPK=362372&Projectid=P071308>.

<sup>3021</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 hard copy on file.

<sup>3022</sup> World Food Program, *World Hunger - Mauritania*, [online] 2005 [cited June 15, 2005]; 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>3023</sup> UNICEF, *At a Glance: Mauritania*, [online] 2005 [cited June 15, 2005]; available from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/mauritania.html>.