

Mauritania

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. 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.²²⁹⁶ The government is currently working with the ILO to plan the child labor study,²²⁹⁷ which the government views as necessary prior to discussion of a broad-based, national program to address the issue.²²⁹⁸ Small-scale efforts to eradicate child labor are taking place, including the passage of a 2002 regulation prohibiting children from selling in the streets of the capital city, Nouakchott,²²⁹⁹ as well as government-funded magazine and TV ads on child labor.²³⁰⁰

In 1999, the Government of Mauritania announced 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 will be placed on pre-school education that prepares children for basic education and on creating incentives to encourage private education.²³⁰¹ The goals for elementary school education are to achieve universal access by 2005, raise the retention rate from 55 to 78 percent by 2010, eliminate gender and regional disparities, improve the quality and relevance of education, and lower the pupil-teacher ratio.²³⁰² Mauritania is also aiming to raise the share of education spending from 3.7 percent of GDP in 1999 to 5.4 percent of GDP by 2015.²³⁰³ The World Bank is assisting the government to achieve these goals through a USD 49.2 million education loan project aimed at increasing enrollment, particularly among girls and in low-performing regions.²³⁰⁴

²²⁹⁶ Khaled Cheikhna, Director of Labor, Mauritanian Ministry of Labor, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²²⁹⁷ Dina, Secretary General, Union des Travailleurs de Mauritanie (UTM), interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002. See also Cheikhna, interview, August 14, 2002.

²²⁹⁸ Cheikhna, interview, August 14, 2002.

²²⁹⁹ Moctar O. Hemeina, U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott official, interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²³⁰⁰ Dina, interview, August 15, 2002.

²³⁰¹ 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 September 4, 2002]; available from <http://www.adeanet.org/newsletter/latest/06.html>.

²³⁰² Ibid.

²³⁰³ Ibid.

²³⁰⁴ 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 1, 2002]; available from <http://www4.worldbank.org/sprojects/Project.asp?pid=P071308>.

Incidence and Nature of Child Labor

In 2000, the ILO estimated that 22.1 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years in Mauritania were working.²³⁰⁵ Children traditionally work on family subsistence farms, as a means of survival.²³⁰⁶ They also perform a wide range of other informal activities, such as working as cashiers,²³⁰⁷ street workers, dishwashers in restaurants, car washers, domestic workers, fishermen,²³⁰⁸ herders, and apprentices in garages.²³⁰⁹ In addition, children living with *marabouts*, or Koranic teachers, assist with domestic work.²³¹⁰ Mauritania abolished slavery in 1980;²³¹¹ however, due to the lack of economic and social opportunities for former slaves, their children are at risk of abject poverty,²³¹² which may serve as an impetus for child labor.

Beginning in July 2001,²³¹³ seven years of school attendance beginning at age 7 became compulsory.²³¹⁴ In 1998, the gross primary enrollment rate was 83.2 percent, and the net primary enrollment rate was 60.2 percent.²³¹⁵ Primary school attendance rates are unavailable for Mauritania. While enrollment rates indicate a level of commitment to education, they do not always reflect children's participation in school.²³¹⁶ Public school is free, but other costs such as books and lunches make education unaffordable for many poor children.²³¹⁷ Ongoing challenges to the provision of quality education in Mauritania include the high dropout and repetition rates, a

²³⁰⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002* [CD-ROM], Washington, D.C., 2002.

²³⁰⁶ Dina, interview, August 15, 2002.

²³⁰⁷ Nahah, Secretary General, Confederation General des Travailleurs de Mauritanie (CGTM), interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²³⁰⁸ Ely Samake, UNICEF, interview with USDOL official, August 15, 2002.

²³⁰⁹ Nahah, interview, August 14, 2002.

²³¹⁰ Sow, interview, August 15, 2002.

²³¹¹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2002: Mauritania*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2002, 449-52, Section 6c [cited September 4, 2002]; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8392.htm>.

²³¹² Samory O. Beye, Secretary General, Confederation Libre des Travailleurs de Mauritanie (CLTM), interview with USDOL official, August 14, 2002.

²³¹³ United Nations Development Programme, *Mauritania Helps Girls by Making Education Compulsory*, [online] 2001 [cited September 4, 2002]; available from <http://www.undp.org/dpa/frontpagearchive/2001/july/25july01/index.html>.

²³¹⁴ Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

²³¹⁵ World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2002*.

²³¹⁶ For a more detailed description on the relationship between education statistics and work, see the preface to this report.

²³¹⁷ Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

shortage of teachers, an inadequate curriculum,²³¹⁸ and poor national infrastructure, which prevents children from accessing schools.²³¹⁹

Child Labor Laws and Enforcement

The Labor Law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years, except in specific circumstances approved by the Minister of Labor.²³²⁰ The Labor Law also prohibits forced labor²³²¹ and sets 18 years as the minimum age for work requiring excessive force, or that could harm the health, safety, or morals of children.²³²² The Labor Law contains special regulations on night work and general working hours for children under 16 years.²³²³ The Criminal Code, which follows Islamic criminal law, establishes strict penalties for engaging in prostitution or procuring prostitutes, ranging from fines to imprisonment for six months to imposition of the death penalty.²³²⁴ Trafficking is not specifically prohibited, but the Criminal Code sets a penalty of imprisonment for the use of fraud or violence to abduct minors.²³²⁵

The Labor Inspectorate is responsible for enforcing child labor laws in the formal sector, and according to the government, no cases of child labor have been reported.²³²⁶ However, the government reportedly lacks the resources to effectively monitor compliance with child labor laws.²³²⁷ Information is not available on prosecutions or convictions related to commercial sexual exploitation of children. According to UNICEF, the government is tightening security at airports and questioning travelers vigilantly as preventive measures against trafficking.²³²⁸

Mauritania ratified both ILO Convention 138 and ILO Convention 182 on December 3, 2001.²³²⁹

²³¹⁸ 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, United Nations, Geneva, November 6, 2001, [cited September 4, 2002]; available from <http://www.unhchr.ch>.

²³¹⁹ Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

²³²⁰ Government of Mauritania, *Code du Travail*, 1963, Loi N. 63.023, (January 1963), Deuxième Livre, Article 1.

²³²¹ *Ibid.*, Premier Livre, Article 3.

²³²² *Ibid.*, Deuxième Livre, Article 47.

²³²³ *Ibid.*, Deuxième Livre, Articles 7-14.

²³²⁴ *Criminal Code of Mauritania*, Articles 307-14 as cited in Protection Project [cited September 4, 2002]; available from <http://www.protectionproject.org>.

²³²⁵ 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 September 4, 2002]; available from [http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/4ec6bda0d30ae362c1256a64002c7a85?0opendocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/4ec6bda0d30ae362c1256a64002c7a85?0opendocument).

²³²⁶ Cheikhna, interview, August 14, 2002.

²³²⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports- 2001: Mauritania*, 449-52, Section 6d.

²³²⁸ Samake, interview, August 15, 2002.

²³²⁹ ILO, *Ratifications by Country*, in ILOLEX, [database online] [cited September 4, 2002]; available from <http://ilolex.ilo.ch:1567/english/newratframeE.htm>.