



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

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Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under
article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms
of Discrimination against Women**

**Replies of Mauritania to the list of issues and questions in
relation to its fourth periodic report^{*,**}**

[Date received: 3 January 2023]

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

** The present document was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent developments.



Replies to the list of issues and questions (CEDAW/C/MRT/Q/4)

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has considered the fourth periodic report of Mauritania on steps taken to give effect to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and on progress made in upholding women's rights, and has submitted a list of issues and additional requested information.
2. The present document contains information in response to the list of issues and questions addressed to Mauritania by the Committee.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 1

3. Mauritania has revised its general reservation to the Convention to a specific reservation, as recommended by the Committee, while remaining in compliance with the Constitution. These reservations were deemed necessary because they concern provisions that are contrary to sharia, the sole source of law under the Constitution.
4. With respect to the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention, Mauritania encourages anything that may improve the performance of the Committee's work.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 2

5. A number of regional training and awareness-raising workshops on the Convention were organized in the interior of the country, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). These workshops brought together non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from the eastern wilayahs in Kiffa, from the southern wilayahs in Kaédi and from the northern wilayahs in Nouadhibou.
6. A series of training sessions for more than 100 women's NGOs were conducted between February 2019 and June 2021. For that purpose, modules were developed on the following topics: (1) the rights enshrined in the Convention and the Maputo Protocol; (2) gender-based violence; (3) the monitoring of human rights violations; (4) women's leadership; (5) women's political participation; (6) advocacy techniques; and (7) basic procedures for assisting victims of violence.
7. Other training sessions, held in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund for members of multisectoral platforms for combating gender-based violence, including female genital mutilation, reached at least 400 people. These people are now focal points for disseminating knowledge and information on women's issues in their respective wilayahs. These awareness-raising initiatives will reach young men, religious leaders, local elected officials, eminent persons from regional department capitals, village committees, the local administration and the security forces.
8. In addition, in April 2019, the Government, in collaboration with the German Agency for International Cooperation, organized a training session on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Twenty-five participants were invited, including 11 members of the judicial system (9 members of the judiciary and 2 court clerks) and 14 representatives of the relevant public administrations and of civil society organizations in Mauritania.

9. The main objective of this training session was to raise the target audience's awareness of the Convention and to identify good practices with regard to combating racial discrimination. Specifically, the following objectives were identified:

- Contributing to the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the universal periodic review concerning the publicization and dissemination of the Convention and of the recommendations
- Strengthening participants' understanding of human rights and, in particular, of combating racial discrimination
- Promoting reflection on the most appropriate ways to combat racial discrimination
- Making recommendations to relevant stakeholders on the need to more effectively combat discrimination and racism

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 3

10. Starting from the beginning of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Government quickly took the necessary measures. Accordingly, a response plan was established on 25 March 2020. The plan included the following key steps:

- Implementation of preventive measures through border closures, curfews and lockdowns
- Launch of awareness-raising campaigns throughout the country
- Establishment of a national solidarity fund
- Acquisition of equipment and medicines
- Direct financial and food support to tens of thousands of poor families
- Abolition of taxes and customs duties on essential products and of municipal taxes on small-scale fishery products
- Coverage of water and electricity bills for poor and rural households
- Arrangement for the repatriation of nationals stranded abroad
- Deployment of 88 rapid response health teams
- Establishment of three screening centres in Nouakchott and of two laboratories specialized in the diagnosis of COVID-19
- Establishment of two specialized critical care centres
- Establishment of an isolation centre with a capacity of 1,120 beds

11. Furthermore, a series of additional steps, including food kit distribution and cash transfers, were taken to reduce the potentially negative impact that these measures might have on the lives of vulnerable groups, especially women and girls.

12. In 2021, emphasis was placed on strengthening prevention measures and improving the screening, diagnosis and management of severe cases, including through the establishment of the specialized Mohamed bin Zayed hospital, which has a capacity of 120 beds. As a result, mortality from COVID-19 was reduced from 2.7 per cent during the second wave to 1.7 per cent during the third.

13. Moreover, owing to the various COVID-19 vaccination campaigns, 600,000 people have been fully vaccinated and more than 1 million people have received the first dose.

14. Investments in response efforts have enabled us to equip 10 of our hospitals with oxygen cylinders and to provide them with more than 100 complete intensive care beds and 14 medical ambulances. With regard to health services, 22 basic health facilities have been built and equipped. In addition, equipment has been provided to medical analysis laboratories in four health centres and radiology equipment has been provided to two other health centres.

15. In 2022, 6 health centres and 15 health posts were built and equipped, 75 per cent of the national health system's needs for products and treatments for acute malnutrition in children will be met, and 1,600,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses will be acquired.

16. In order to strengthen human resources, 1,555 staff members comprising general practitioners, specialists and paramedics have been recruited to health facilities. In addition, more than 50 international medical specialists and technicians trained in intensive care have been mobilized, 17 curricula for all specialties and all medical schools have been revised, and a high-quality generic manual for the certification of such schools has been established.

17. In order to improve the living conditions of health-care employees, a 30 per cent increase in their salaries and regularly paid area- and distance-based bonuses have been introduced.

18. In addition, 4,493 people received care in 2021, in fulfilment of the commitment of the President of the Republic to make intensive care free for all citizens, 8,071 medical evacuations were carried out free of charge, and 86,757 pregnant women benefited from the set fee for obstetric care, which was reduced by 55 per cent.

19. In addition, universal health coverage, an important commitment of the President of the Republic, has been initiated through the establishment of full medical insurance coverage for the 100,000 poorest households, comprising more than 620,000 people.

20. With regard to cash transfers for poor households, an initial cash transfer operation was carried out in 2020 for 186,293 households nationwide. A second cash transfer, benefiting 210,000 poor households nationwide, was carried out in 2021.

21. The following forms of aid have been provided to poor households affected by COVID-19:

- Aid for poor households affected by the COVID-19 crisis: 495,841,550 ouguiyas
- Aid for poor households affected by the COVID-19 crisis: 494,301,937 ouguiyas
- Assistance for vulnerable musicians, 2021: 740 households
- Aid for poor households affected by the COVID-19 crisis: 2,000,000 ouguiyas

22. A number of food distribution operations were also carried out during and after lockdown.

23. In 2020, as part of the response to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government, through the Temwine programme and in collaboration with the national army, distributed, free of charge, food kits benefiting 20,200 households in Nouakchott, including 200 foreign households, for a total cost of 42,000,000 ouguiyas.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 4

24. The Nationality Code has been revised to correct the provisions relating to the automatic granting of nationality to the children of foreign fathers. A consultant has been hired to revise and harmonize the Personal Status Code with the human rights-related commitments of Mauritania, particularly those concerning women.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 5

25. The national observatory for women's and girls' rights is an independent and autonomous advisory institution for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls. The observatory has an operating budget of 170,000,000 ouguiyas and is responsible for:

- Monitoring, evaluating and formulating proposals to promote the rights of women and girls in public policies
- Assisting the Government in providing advice and strategic guidance relating to gender and the promotion of the rights of women and girls
- Assisting the parliament, civil society and all stakeholders in providing advice and guidance and in promoting the rights of women and girls
- Contributing to the preparation of development strategies related to the rights of women and girls and to the integration of gender into development programmes
- Contributing to the preparation of reports on the implementation of national policies and laws concerning women and girls
- Participating in advocacy efforts and in the strengthening of the national movement for the promotion of the rights of women and girls

26. With regard to the implementation of the national gender mainstreaming strategy, sectoral gender units have been established in all ministerial departments and have been provided with budgets. These units are responsible for ensuring that gender is taken into account in sectoral policies, strategies and action plans.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 6

27. Legal aid is enshrined in Act No. 2015-030 and is granted to destitute and low-income people at all stages of proceedings. Legal aid offices have been established and set up in all wilayah courts. In 2022, 120 applicants, including 58 women, received legal aid.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 7

28. Mauritania has implemented reforms in recent years in order to promote women's political participation in society.

29. In that connection, the Government has:

- Adopted a national strategy for the advancement of women, defining the main policy options in that area and comprising two objectives, mainly relating to the promotion of girls' education and to information, education and communication, in order to combat sociocultural prejudices and sexist stereotypes that are detrimental to the status of women and girls

- Adopted a national gender mainstreaming strategy, aimed at ensuring that gender is mainstreamed in development programmes and projects
 - Adopted a rural women's action plan, focused on priorities for initiatives targeted at rural women and girls
 - Adopted a national family policy, aimed at contributing to the stability and development of the family
 - Adopted a national child protection strategy, designed to facilitate prevention and support for child victims of violence, exploitation, discrimination, abuse and negligence
 - Adopted national standard operating procedures for combating gender-based violence, including early marriage, which ensure effective coordination and consultation regarding such violence, as well as the implementation of responses in accordance with the required rules and procedures
 - Adopted a national strategy for the discontinuation of female genital mutilation, which is being implemented
 - Established a national list of 20 women candidates for election as members of the National Assembly
 - Established a national list of 20 candidates and another list of 18 candidates for election in the district of Nouakchott
 - Increased the number of districts with three seats to be filled by proportional representation
 - Developed financial incentives for political parties that elect more women
 - Established a national list of 11 young people on which the names of men and women candidates are alternated and 2 persons with disabilities must be included
30. Likewise, the Government has:
- Increased to 6 per cent the ratio of scholarships granted to girls
 - Opened vocational training centres for women and girls who have dropped out of school, from which 1,463 students have graduated
 - Awarded prizes to girls who have graduated from various levels of education
 - Organized annual national fairs for the exhibition of women's products
 - Launched a programme relating to girls' education and to equity, involving the implementation of three main components:
 - An information, education and communication component, dedicated to sociocultural barriers and involving communities, religious leaders and the promotion of role models for girls
 - An income-generating activities component, aimed at promoting the availability of textbooks and school supplies, school canteens and means of transportation, in order to address poverty-related constraints faced by parents and communities
 - A component involving remedial classes for girls in rural areas who are in their final year of primary or secondary school

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 8

31. Several steps have been taken to reduce the persistence of sexist stereotypes and harmful practices affecting women. Examples include:

- Development and implementation of a national action plan on gender-based violence
- Updating and implementation of the national strategy to combat female genital mutilation
- Implementation of standard operating procedures to improve the response to gender-based violence and ensure holistic care for survivors
- Implementation of an action plan to encourage the voluntary discontinuation of female genital mutilation in wilayahs in which the practice is very widespread
- Issuance, through public and private media, of a fatwa calling for the prohibition of female genital mutilation
- Organization of campaigns to combat child marriage and forced feeding

32. Other activities have been conducted in order to raise public awareness of stereotypes and practices that are harmful to women, namely:

- Observance of the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation
- Implementation of a programme to promote the discontinuation of female genital mutilation
- Approval of a bill on combating violence against women and girls
- Organization of several awareness-raising campaigns and caravans to combat harmful practices (force-feeding, child marriage, female genital mutilation)

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 9

33. The bill on combating violence against women was withdrawn from the National Assembly for circumstantial and exceptional reasons. The process of rescheduling the consideration of the bill has begun and it will be adopted in the near future.

34. In 2022, 219 cases of violence against women were recorded and prosecuted in the courts. These cases consist mainly of rape. Cases of adultery (zina) are completely separate from assaults against women. A total of 131 adultery cases were recorded and prosecuted in the wilayah courts. There were 679 cases involving children, including boys and girls, either as perpetrators or victims, in 2022.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 10

35. In Mauritania, the most common forms of trafficking are forced child begging, forced or exploitative labour, forced early marriage, forced prostitution and contemporary forms of slavery. The exploitation of Mauritanian workers abroad is also a form of trafficking.

36. During the universal periodic review of the Human Rights Council, the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society made a commitment, on behalf of Mauritania, to prepare and implement a

national action plan on combating trafficking in persons, covering the period 2020–2022.

37. This action plan was prepared by the Commission, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, using a participatory approach involving all relevant State and non-State actors. It was adopted by the Government in March 2020, for a period of 3 years.

38. The action plan, which is focused on prevention, protection, prosecution and partnership-building, has nine objectives, namely:

- Preventing trafficking in persons through awareness-raising
- Documenting the phenomenon of trafficking
- Building stakeholder capacities
- Improving the legal framework on trafficking
- Strengthening the punishment of trafficking by courts
- Protecting victims and witnesses of trafficking
- Assisting victims of trafficking by ensuring their social reintegration and/or voluntary return
- Coordinating national efforts to combat trafficking
- Promoting regional and international cooperation on combating trafficking

39. Mauritania is a party to a number of legal instruments directly or indirectly related to trafficking in persons (see list in annex), including the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the Convention (the Palermo Protocol).

40. Mauritania also has a significant corpus of national laws on the matter, as described below.

Act No. 2020-17 on the prevention and punishment of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims

41. This law considerably strengthens the punishment (prosecution) of trafficking and now takes into account the other dimensions of combating trafficking in persons: prevention, protection, assistance to victims and partnership.

42. The law also defines the scope of prosecutions for trafficking and of assistance for victims. In particular, it includes the right to reparations and exempts victims from prosecution for offences that they were forced to commit by traffickers.

43. Under the law, courts in Mauritania are competent to prosecute, among other individuals, the perpetrators of trafficking offences committed in Mauritania or committed outside Mauritania by perpetrators of Mauritanian nationality, either against victims of Mauritanian nationality or against foreign or stateless victims whose usual place of residence is in Mauritania.

44. Slavery, which has been considered a crime against humanity since the adoption of Act No. 2015-031, is now recognized as a form of trafficking in persons, in accordance with the definition contained in that Act.

45. The law establishes mechanisms for protection (physical and psychological protection, accommodation, relocation of the venue of hearings, the holding of hearings in camera at the request of the victim, ensuring anonymity upon request, and data protection) and for assistance to victims (free care and treatment, social

assistance, information on proceedings for victims, legal aid, prohibition of the repatriation of the victim during the investigation, and voluntary return).

Act No. 2015-031 on the criminalization of slavery and the punishment of slavery-like practices

46. In accordance with the 2012 constitutional amendments establishing slavery as a crime against humanity and with the road map on the eradication of contemporary forms of slavery, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 6 March 2014, this law gives concrete form to the Government's guidelines by introducing a set of definitions that facilitate the implementation of the law through the use of clear and precise terminology related to slavery. The law incorporates the offences set out in the international conventions on slavery while upholding the non-applicability of any statute of limitations to such offences, and increases the penalties for slavery and slavery-like practices by bringing them into line with those set out for the crimes.

47. The law establishes specialized courts with jurisdiction over offences relating to slavery and slavery-like practices and provides that victims of slavery-like practices shall receive legal aid and shall not bear the costs of proceedings. The law also provides for the enforcement of judicial decisions granting compensation to victims of slavery and slavery-like practices, notwithstanding the remedies available, and requires the judge hearing the case to take, as a matter of urgency, the necessary provisional measures against the perpetrators of the offences in order to protect the rights of the victims.

Act No. 2020-018 on combating the smuggling of migrants

48. This law strengthens the coordination of efforts to combat trafficking and smuggling networks that facilitate the irregular passage of migrants to other countries.

1. Institutional framework

49. Mauritania has many State and non-State institutions that are responsible for combating trafficking in persons. Examples are indicated below.

Specialized courts for combating slavery

50. Specialized courts for combating slavery were established in 2016, pursuant to Act No. 2015-031 on the criminalization of slavery and the punishment of slavery-like practices. There are three such courts, covering the whole country.

	<i>Court</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Territorial jurisdiction</i>
1	Southern special criminal court for combating slavery	Nouakchott Sud	Wilayahs of Brakna, Gorgol, Trarza, Tagant, Inchiri, Nouakchott Sud, Nouakchott Ouest and Nouakchott Nord
2	Northern special criminal court for combating slavery	Nouadhibou	Wilayahs of Adrar, Dakhlet Nouadhibou and Tiris Zemmour
3	Eastern special criminal court for combating slavery	Néma	Wilayahs of Hodh ech Chargi, Hodh el Gharbi, Assaba and Guidimaka

51. The specialized courts for combating slavery have all been provided with the human and financial resources necessary to ensure their operation. The provisions for such courts under the general State budget were increased by 100 per cent in 2021.

52. The Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society, in partnership with OHCHR, has just completed a study on improving the setup of these courts. The aim of the study is to propose amendments to Act No. 2015-031 in order to further strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of the courts. The study is being discussed with the Ministry of Justice and the results will be introduced at the forum on justice, scheduled for early 2023.

Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society

53. The Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society, as the main public entity focused on human rights, is responsible for tasks such as developing and implementing the national policy for the promotion and protection of human rights.

54. Accordingly, it acts as the Government's focal point on those matters and will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the procedures provided for by the national referral and guidance mechanism for victims of trafficking and smuggled migrants.

National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants

55. The recently established National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants is responsible for punishing trafficking by coordinating the efforts of the criminal justice system and for implementing the operational aspects of the national action plan on combating trafficking in persons in Mauritania. The Authority works with other ministerial departments in order to mobilize the funds necessary to fulfil its responsibilities.

56. Moreover, the Authority operates both upstream and downstream of the commission on trafficking. It also involves civil society in the non-judicial aspects of combating trafficking in persons (training, education, awareness-raising, aid and assistance to victims, and collaboration with the law enforcement and security forces involved in countering trafficking).

National Human Rights Commission

57. The National Human Rights Commission is an independent and autonomous advisory institution that has a broad membership and is responsible for advice, monitoring, warning, mediation and evaluation with regard to respect for human rights. It provides opinions on matters relating to the promotion and protection of human rights and to respect for individual and collective freedoms.

58. The status of the Commission as a constitutional institution strengthens its rootedness and independence within the institutional framework in Mauritania, and the criteria for the selection of its members take into account professionalism, competence and pluralism, in accordance with the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and with the Paris Principles.

59. The National Human Rights Commission has been accredited with "A" status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and has a complaint mechanism.

National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture

60. The National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture, an independent institution established in accordance with the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, is responsible for preventing torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in places of deprivation of liberty. It thus makes regular scheduled and unannounced visits to such places. It was established in 2015 and its mandate was renewed in 2020.

61. In addition, during the current year the Government established an interministerial committee responsible for guidance, supervision and the monitoring of matters related to the prevention and punishment of trafficking in persons and the protection of victims. This committee is chaired by the Prime Minister and meets on a monthly basis.

2. Awareness-raising activities

62. Much of the work carried out by the Government and NGOs to combat trafficking in persons is focused on prevention, as trafficking is partly caused by cultural practices that are deeply rooted in society and by a lack of collective awareness.

63. Over the past three years, efforts to promote education and awareness of trafficking in persons have increased. The following activities have been conducted:

- Organization, throughout 2021 and in collaboration with civil society, of 19 campaigns to raise public awareness of laws on combating trafficking and slavery, which directly reached approximately 78,000 people.
- Organization, in March 2021 and in collaboration with OHCHR in Mauritania, of 14 training sessions on anti-trafficking laws for administrative, judicial and security authorities throughout the country.
- Funding, in 2021, of six mass awareness-raising campaigns on trafficking in persons for leading NGOs focused on the matter, including SOS-Esclaves and Flambeau de la Liberté, targeting the populations of the wilayahs of Hodh ech Chargi, Assaba, Brakna, Trarza, Guidimaka and Gorgol.
- Production and distribution of short films on child labour, forced labour, *talibé* children and the exploitation of migrants. These films are shown on television and at major events relating to human rights.
- In March 2022, the Government funded the organization, by the founding NGOs of the forum of the Group of Five for the Sahel on combating slavery, of a subregional conference on contemporary forms of slavery in the Sahel. This conference was held from 16 to 17 May 2022 in Nouakchott, under the patronage of the President of the Republic and under the theme “Making combating slavery a common and consensual effort of civil society and of the Governments of the Sahel countries”.
- Development of an illustrated booklet on the rights of the victims and witnesses of trafficking (in all national languages).
- Observance, on 30 July 2022, of the World Day against Trafficking in Persons, during which the results of the quantitative and qualitative study on forced child begging, child and forced labour, early and forced marriage, and forced prostitution in Nouakchott were shared.

- Launch, on 13 October of last year and in collaboration with human rights organizations, of a broad campaign, covering the whole country and involving the regional platforms of civil society organizations, in order to raise awareness of laws on trafficking in persons, slavery, discrimination and torture. This national campaign was aimed at the general public and at administrative, judicial and security authorities. Various activities (door-to-door visits, events, marches, meetings and audiovisual broadcasts) were carried out under the campaign. Approximately 494,896 people were directly reached by this campaign, in addition to the people indirectly targeted by the media.

3. Efforts to build stakeholder capacities

64. A number of activities were conducted in order to build the capacities of stakeholders focused on combating trafficking in persons, namely:

- Development, in 2021, of training modules on addressing trafficking for border officials, Qur'anic teachers, labour inspectors and judicial police officers, among other individuals. Five training modules have been developed. These modules have been used by the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society to provide specialized training. They will also be integrated into the training curricula of national training schools, such as the National School of Administration, Journalism and the Judiciary, the police academy and the defence college.
- Holding, from 20 to 22 September 2022, of a train-the-trainers session on addressing trafficking in persons for 22 representatives of the public administration (the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Public Service and the Ministry of Social Affairs), law enforcement personnel (the judicial police, the national police and the coast guard), the National Human Rights Commission and civil society organizations.
- Organization, in the interior of the country and in collaboration with OHCHR, of 12 training workshops on techniques for documenting and monitoring cases of slavery and trafficking for human rights NGOs. Three hundred NGOs benefited from these workshops.
- Development of a code of conduct for special investigations relating to trafficking. The goal of this code is to provide judicial police officers with training on best practices in the management of special investigations aimed at truth-seeking in cases of offences relating to trafficking in persons.

4. Criminal punishment

65. Adjudications concerning trafficking have increased. Comprehensive jurisprudence is now available. Trials have been held and judgments have been handed down at all judicial levels.

66. In 2022, 73 cases of trafficking in persons were recorded. The sentences handed down in the cases tried ranged from 6 months to 10 years of imprisonment.

- Steps have been taken to facilitate the filing of complaints by victims of slavery, who are automatically entitled to legal aid and are exempt from all criminal court fees and costs, which are covered by the State.
- The Government organized, in June 2021 and in collaboration with OHCHR and the International Labour Office, a round-table discussion on key issues relating to the implementation of Act No. 2015-031 on the criminalization of slavery and the punishment of slavery-like practices. Members of the judiciary, lawyers and

human rights NGOs participated in this round table. A road map for the implementation of the recommendations from the round table was adopted and a monitoring committee was established.

- Development and dissemination of joint circular No. 104-2021 of 26 November 2021, signed by the Minister of Justice, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Defence, urging the members of the judiciary and instructing the judicial police to strictly implement the laws punishing slavery and trafficking. The general objective of this circular is to instruct the judicial and security authorities (the members of the judiciary and judicial officers, the judicial police and other actors) to pay particular attention to cases of trafficking in general and to those of slavery in particular, in order to ensure the efficient, impartial and conclusive treatment of complaints and reported cases.
- The visit of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences, was conducted from 4 to 13 May 2022. During the visit, the Special Rapporteur met with the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, members of the Government, the heads of national human rights institutions, judicial and administrative authorities in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, national civil society organizations, labour unions, international organizations, permanent missions based in Mauritania and citizens.

67. At the end of his visit, the Special Rapporteur issued a press release in which he noted the significant progress made by our country in eradicating slavery and slavery-like practices. He also noted the important changes made in the criminal justice system in order to strengthen the punishment of slavery-like practices.

68. He also praised the activities conducted to raise awareness of laws on combating slavery and encouraged the Government in its efforts to address the remaining challenges.

69. The Special Rapporteur made 23 recommendations to the Government on ways to further strengthen efforts to combat slavery and its contemporary forms (see annex). The Government has established a committee to monitor the implementation of these recommendations and has taken the following steps:

- Conduct of the study on the strengthening of the special criminal courts (see page 9 above).
- Establishment of a fund to assist and support victims of trafficking.
- The Attorney General has organized a nationwide tour to provide explanations and guidance for public prosecutors, starting from 18 October 2022.
- The Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society is working to implement a new mechanism for receiving and processing complaints relating to slavery-like practices, in line with its new responsibility to intervene as a third party in criminal proceedings concerning slavery cases.
- Legal aid offices are in operation and hold monthly meetings.
- A committee to monitor the implementation of the recommendations from the round table on slavery was established in September 2021. It has been expanded in accordance with memorandum No. 086 of 6 October 2022, addressed to a representative of the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society.

5. Protection efforts

70. The current system of protection and assistance for victims of trafficking in Mauritania has been strengthened by Act No. 2020-17 on trafficking in persons, in which protection mechanisms and assistance measures for victims of trafficking, their families and witnesses are set out and extended to the judicial officers involved, undercover agents and whistle-blowers, where necessary.

71. In the implementation of protection mechanisms and assistance measures, particular attention is paid to women, children, persons with disabilities, migrants in vulnerable situations and refugees.

72. Responsibility for protection against trafficking is entrusted to the National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants, which has been operationalized.

73. The following steps have been taken in that connection:

- Preparation of a manual for protection and assistance for victims and witnesses of trafficking
- Development, by the International Organization for Migration for the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Affairs and Relations with Civil Society, of a national referral and guidance mechanism for victims of trafficking in persons and smuggled migrants in Mauritania. Through this mechanism, it will be possible to identify victims and their needs in order to provide them with the necessary support. The mechanism will be managed by the National Authority for Combating Trafficking in Persons and the Smuggling of Migrants

6. Documentation efforts

74. Until 2020, there had been no specific studies or statistics on trafficking in persons in Mauritania. The following studies have been conducted in recent years:

- Quantitative and qualitative study on forced child begging, child and forced labour, early and forced marriage, and forced prostitution in Nouakchott
- Study on forced child begging, child and forced labour, early and forced marriage in Nouadhibou, Rosso, Kaédi and Kiffa
- Study on contemporary forms of slavery in Mauritania
- Mapping study on areas that may be sources of child trafficking in Mauritania
- Establishment of a baseline situation (analysis of forms of trafficking) in Mauritania based on specific studies

7. Cooperation

75. Cooperation is mainly focused on mutual legal assistance and the exchange of information among various countries, using a regional and international approach.

76. International cooperation in criminal matters is essential to combating trafficking in persons, owing to the transnational nature of the crime.

77. Partnerships between States have been established in order to facilitate:

- The exchange of information regarding trafficking networks and other organized crime groups exclusively or partially dedicated to trafficking
- Mutual legal assistance, particularly in investigations and prosecutions

- Cooperation between bodies responsible for detection, punishment and immigration and other relevant bodies in the States concerned
- The exchange of information on the means and methods used by organized criminal groups for the purpose of trafficking in persons, including the recruitment and transportation of victims, routes and links between and among individuals and groups engaged in such trafficking, and possible measures for detecting them
- The voluntary return of victims of trafficking to their countries of origin

78. Although Mauritania has not been a member of the Economic Community of West African States since 2000, its new association agreement with Community members, most of which are neighbouring countries, will facilitate, among other things, cooperation in the area of mutual legal assistance in criminal matters (the gathering of testimonies and statements, the submission of judicial documents, searches and seizures, and the confiscation of the proceeds of criminal activities).

79. The agreement on criminal police cooperation between the States members of the Economic Community of West African States also provides for “cooperation in investigations conducted in the territory of either party, the conduct of regular and ad hoc joint police operations in specific areas of transnational crime, and the obligation to comply with the instructions of the competent authorities of the State in whose territory the operations are carried out”.

80. Mauritania has other arrangements for cooperation in investigations conducted in other countries, in particular with Mali, Guinea and Senegal.

81. Moreover, under arrangements between States of the Sahel, the security and defence forces of one State are now authorized to prosecute criminals in the territory of another State.

82. Last August, the Government signed an agreement on mutual legal assistance with Senegal.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 11

83. All legally recognized political parties participated in the 2018 legislative elections, with a total of 724 candidate lists across all electoral districts.

Results of the 2018 municipal elections

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Municipal councillors</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Mayors</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	2 446	63.85	214	97.72
Female	1 385	36.15	4	2.28
Total	3 831	100	218	100

Results of the 2018 regional elections

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Regional councillors</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Chairs of regional councils</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	186	65.26	12	92.31
Female	99	34.74	1	7.69
Total	285	100	13	100

Results of the 2018 legislative elections

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Members of the National Assembly</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Male	123	80.39
Female	30	19.61
Total	153	100

84. Examples of the steps taken by the Government to promote the political participation of women, especially in rural areas, are as follows:

- Establishment of a national programme aimed at promoting the political participation of women in various elections
- Adoption of a national list of 20 women candidates for election as members of the National Assembly
- Adoption of a national list of 20 candidates and another list of 18 candidates for election in the district of Nouakchott
- Increase in the number of districts with three seats to be filled by proportional representation
- Granting of financial incentives for political parties that elect more women
- Establishment, for the 2023 legislative elections, of a national list of 11 young people on which the names of men and women candidates are alternated and 2 persons with disabilities must be included

85. Other activities have strengthened this progress. They include mainly the monitoring of the implementation of laws and regulations promoting women's participation in political life, particularly at the decision-making level, including the reform of the electoral system and the adoption of temporary special measures such as appointments to key positions in the administration. Women are currently represented in the Constitutional Council, the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council, and the judiciary. They also hold key positions in the management and administration of justice.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 12

86. The provisions relating to the transmission of the mother's nationality to her child and spouse are not discriminatory for the following reasons:

- Article 6 of Act No. 61-112 on the Nationality Code stipulates that all provisions relating to nationality contained in duly ratified and published international treaties and agreements are applicable, even if they run counter to Mauritanian law.
- Article 8 provides that a child born to a Mauritanian mother and a father who is stateless or of unknown nationality is Mauritanian from birth. The same is true of a child who is born in Mauritania to a Mauritanian mother and a father of foreign nationality.
- Any minor child whose father or mother acquires Mauritanian nationality automatically becomes Mauritanian (article 15 of Act No. 2010-023).
- A child born abroad to a Mauritanian mother and a foreign father may opt for Mauritanian nationality at the age of 17, in accordance with article 13.

- Under article 31, amended by Act No. 2021-016 of 6 August 2021, multiple nationalities are authorized.
- With regard to the acquisition of nationality by marriage, the conditions are the same for men and women. Part III, chapter 2, of Act No. 61-112 has been repealed (article 2 of Act No. 2010-023) and replaced by chapter 3, “Naturalization”, which establishes the same conditions for the acquisition of Mauritanian nationality through naturalization for both spouses, without distinction between men and women.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 13

87. The strategy adopted by the Ministry of Education is aimed at ensuring equal and equitable access to education for all children in Mauritania and at preventing them from dropping out of school.

88. The promotion of girls’ education is therefore an important objective of the Ministry’s policy that is being fulfilled through the Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend project, financed by the World Bank. During the first phase of the project, 49,000 brochures were distributed to students in their fourth and seventh years of secondary school, 2,400 scholarships were granted to girls from families in need in order to promote retention, and tutoring was provided to 6,000 girls. During the second phase, 100,000 textbooks, including 54,000 for the primary education level, were produced, printed and distributed, transportation support was provided for 5,000 girls, school kits were distributed to 36,000 girls, tutoring in core subjects was provided for 9,000 girls in their sixth year of primary school and for 7,000 girls in their final year of secondary school, 18 cybercafés were opened in secondary schools, and access to safe spaces was expanded to 30,000 girls in secondary school.

89. To strengthen economic support and assistance, school meals are provided to 72,000 girls in rural areas in order to facilitate their access to school and prevent them from dropping out.

90. The Ministry of Education has allocated 1,300,000 ouguiyas for education under the priority education zone project, which is entirely targeted at the most remote and vulnerable areas.

91. All concepts related to reproductive health have been integrated into secondary school curricula in six appropriate disciplines (religious instruction, history and geography, Arabic, French and natural sciences).

92. With respect to the promotion of national languages, the policy of the Department of National Languages of the University of Nouakchott Al Asriya continues to be followed. In the report issued following the most recent national consultations on the reform of the education system, held in mid-November 2021, it was recommended that all students in Mauritania speak a national language in addition to their mother tongue. Accordingly, it was agreed that national languages would be made languages of instruction, at least at the preschool level. Such languages will, however, be taught in technical and vocational schools.

93. With regard to progress made in relation to students with disabilities, in addition to the opening of the centre for training and social advancement for children with disabilities, which has five educational units for children with disabilities and four regional campuses, two classes in the fourth and fifth years of secondary school have been established for deaf students at Arafat 2 High School, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family, which provides translators.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 14

94. The 2019–2022 national employment strategy has still not been fully implemented, as it is a project that requires a substantial budget and an operational implementation structure. The Government has nevertheless implemented the strategy’s main pillars through targeted sectoral projects, thus contributing to mainstreaming employment across government policies. Specifically, it has:

- Developed microfinance for the benefit of the rural sector, enabling the funding of and support for rural agricultural projects
- Promoted the establishment of an integrated, professional entrepreneurial ecosystem in order to create a network of formal, profitable and sustainable small and medium-sized enterprises that generate decent jobs throughout the country. This has enabled:
 - The funding of and support for 2,500 small and medium-sized enterprises in the productive sectors of the national economy, with 40 per cent of the beneficiaries being women
 - The creation of 7,500 direct jobs
 - The provision of local non-financial services to small and medium-sized enterprises through the strengthening of the organizational and operational capacities of at least three ecosystem stakeholders across all wilayahs
 - The provision of training and coaching in entrepreneurship for 2,250 entrepreneurs, at least 40 per cent of whom were women
- Completed the procedures for the establishment and operationalization of the loan guarantee fund for small and medium-sized enterprises. The establishment of this fund will facilitate access to credit for small and medium-sized enterprises, women and young project managers
- Allocated aid to all higher education graduates
- Merged all employment funds and established a single national employment fund, for which 2 billion ouguiyas are provided annually in order to fund activities and programmes designed to promote employment and youth entrepreneurship, placement, internships, support for integration and assistance for project managers.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 15

95. Mauritania makes no distinction among its citizens, who are equal before the law, in accordance with the Constitution of 20 July 1991, revised in 2006, 2012 and 2017, whose article 1 provides that “Mauritania is an indivisible, democratic and social Islamic republic. The Republic guarantees all citizens equality before the law, without distinction as to origin, race, sex or social status.”

96. Harassment in the workplace is prohibited by labour laws, which ensure freedom of work. Freedom of work involves the preservation of physical and moral integrity and the obligation of the employer to provide a work environment that is conducive to the development of the employee. No cases of harassment have been reported to the labour inspectorates.

97. In addition to the Labour Code and the Collective Labour Agreement, women domestic workers benefit from a regulation dedicated to them (Order No. 1797 of

18 August 2011 determining the general conditions of employment for domestic workers).

98. They therefore have access to effective complaint procedures and redress.

99. In order to preserve and promote women's rights, the Government has just amended the Labour Code by introducing measures specifically benefiting women.

100. The purpose of this revision was to ensure better social coverage through improved compensation for certain categories of employees: women observing the waiting period following the death of their spouse or a divorce, during which they may not remarry, women on maternity leave and workers who are victims of accidents or illnesses unrelated to work.

101. A technical commission has been established to accelerate the ratification by Mauritania of the workers rights-related international instruments that it has not yet ratified. Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) of the International Labour Organization is a high priority of this commission because its content has already been included in the national legal corpus and its ratification will not entail substantial changes to that corpus.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 16

102. Act No. 2017-025 on reproductive health is implemented by Decree No. 2018-080 of 7 May 2018. As a result, medical services related to reproductive, maternal and child health are accessible and free. Specifically:

- Contraceptive products are distributed free of charge at health facilities.
- The set fee for obstetric care is covered by the Government through the priority programme of the President of the Republic.
- Free care is provided for the most disadvantaged, particularly children, pregnant women and persons with disabilities.
- Free health insurance coverage is provided for 100,000 households.

103. Mental health care is an important focus of the national health system and is provided by the Specialty Hospital Centre, established pursuant to Decree No. 2013-173. Every individual has the right to the highest standard of physical and mental health. Health facilities guarantee adequate and equitable access to health care for all persons, without discrimination, through the following means:

- Provision of free care for the most disadvantaged
- A specific national programme on mental and neurological health
- The Specialty Hospital Centre
- The National Health Solidarity Fund
- The "Muyassar" programme

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 17

104. Since 2016, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family has been implementing a national programme to finance income-generating activities and small projects for women members of women's cooperatives and economic interest groups (women graduates of the Ministry's vocational training centres, certificate

holders and persons with disabilities, groups and individuals in all wilayahs in the country).

105. Under Decree No. 3284, the operational arrangements of this programme were set out and a national supervisory committee led by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Children and the Family, as well as subcommittees led by walis (governors) at the regional level, were established.

106. The responsibilities of these committees are as follows:

- Supervisory committee: to establish the necessary criteria for the distribution of funds at the regional level and for the approval of the selection of the beneficiaries
- Subcommittees: to select the beneficiaries on the basis of the criteria established by the supervisory committee

107. The loans are distributed to the beneficiaries through a contract with a savings and credit union, which is responsible for allocating and collecting the loan amounts.

Number of projects and amounts distributed

<i>Wilayah</i>	<i>Number of projects</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Hodh ech Chargi	96	4 131 000
Hodh el Gharbi	19	1 150 000
Assaba	170	4 715 000
Gorgol	107	2 145 000
Brakna	121	3 765 000
Trarza	120	5 294 700
Adrar	392	8 780 000
Dakhlet Nouadhibou	243	4 881 150
Tagant	85	2 530 000
Guidimaka	72	1 980 000
Tiris Zemmour	53	1 720 000
Inchiri	50	1 560 000
Nouakchott	2 700	67 237 157
Total	4 228	109 889 007

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 21

108. The Government has just developed a national strategy for resilience and humanitarian action, which takes into account measures to integrate disaster risk reduction into development processes and to counter the adverse impact of climate change. The strategy is consistent with the guidance contained in the national strategy for accelerated growth and shared prosperity while being aligned with the country's commitments to disaster risk management and reduction. The guidelines, objectives and action plan set forth in the national strategy for resilience and humanitarian action offer a new approach to the coordination of humanitarian efforts and reflect the results of the consultations in which the various stakeholders participated.

109. The national action plan for capacity-building in the area of disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness and response was developed in order to address the priorities set out in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

This national action plan is the framework document of the national strategy for resilience and humanitarian action for disaster risk reduction.

110. An assessment of humanitarian action has shown that Mauritania, like the other countries of the Sahel, is facing many humanitarian challenges with multiple causes.

111. **A weak and undiversified rural economy.** The rural economy, which accounts, on average, for more than 30 per cent of the national gross domestic product, has been significantly affected by climate change and other hazards and social changes.

112. **Slowly declining poverty.** According to the results of the 2019 continuous survey of household living standards, the poverty rate in Mauritania is 28.2 per cent (the poverty line is estimated at 19,100 ouguiyas), whereas, in 2014, it was 30.9 per cent, representing a decline of 2.7 per cent. Poverty remains a rural problem; the poverty rate is 41.2 per cent in rural areas, compared with 14.4 per cent in urban areas.

113. **Limited basic services.** Access to education, health care, water, energy, transportation and new information and communications technologies in Mauritania is very limited. The most recent data on access to basic services show that, on the basis of current indicator trends, Mauritania will not be able to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

114. **A large influx of refugees.** The crisis in Mali has caused tens of thousands to flee insecurity and to settle mainly in Hodh ech Chargi and in urban centres. The official number of refugees is 89,790, according to July 2022 data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

115. **Heavy dependence on imports.** Mauritania is largely dependent on products imported from abroad because of the weakness of the industrial sector and a lack of investment. In addition, the global economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have had a negative impact on the national economy.

116. The main hazards that can create disasters or exacerbate fragile situations in Mauritania are described below:

- Increasingly frequent droughts. Although this phenomenon occurred often in Mauritania long before the establishment of the modern State, it has intensified significantly owing to the effects of climate change and human pressure on natural resources.
- Although rainfall is rare, flooding is also a frequent occurrence in Mauritania and is also related to climate change. The damage caused by these floods affects production systems, transportation infrastructure and homes.
- Each year, bush fires greatly jeopardize the production of critical biomass for livestock, although the scope of such fires depends on the extent of the grazing land and on prevention measures. The available data show that the area affected by these fires has decreased somewhat owing to annual campaigns carried out in order to clear firebreaks in grazing areas. Bushfires nevertheless continue to destroy thousands of hectares of grazing land on which the survival of livestock depends.
- The locust invasions experienced periodically by Mauritania also threaten food security in the country. Locusts are the most destructive migratory pest in the world, jeopardizing the food security of a portion of the planet.
- Ecological threats are also on the list of hazards, as the country is not immune to oil spills in coastal areas or to the contamination of the water system by cyanide as a result of mineral and oil exploitation.

- Storms are very intense and occur frequently. They mainly destroy dilapidated dwellings. They also cause the loss of human and animal life, the degradation of vegetation and the siltation of cultivated land and grass in pastoral areas. Epidemics such as cholera, measles, meningitis and Rift Valley fever occur regularly in Mauritania. The country has also been affected by the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

117. The strategic aims used as the basis for the development of the strategy for resilience and humanitarian action are strengthening the governance of humanitarian action, integrating the humanitarian-development nexus approach, integrating issues related to refugees and migrants into public policies, and shifting the focus of public programmes towards building resilience capacities and mobilizing funding.

118. The 2023–2025 action plan under the strategy will include a set of programmes whose implementation, through a concerted approach, should facilitate the achievement of the strategy’s objectives. The plan has an estimated cost of 1,621,000,000 ouguiyas and is based on three pillars comprising programmes underpinned by activities.

119. The pillar related to the strengthening of governance comprises activities to improve the governance of humanitarian action. The proposed programmes are aimed at establishing a national framework for crisis prevention and management, building stakeholder capacities, improving knowledge of disasters, harmonizing and modernizing monitoring tools, raising public awareness and involving local actors.

120. Building community resilience is the second major pillar of the strategy. This pillar is aimed at developing, through a series of activities, the skills and knowledge of vulnerable groups in order to reduce their vulnerability and better address the impact of crises on their living conditions. Under the pillar, emphasis will be placed on capacity-building, the implementation of resilience-strengthening activities, social protection, the promotion of the humanitarian-development nexus approach, and support to refugee populations.

121. The third pillar of the strategy is aimed at building emergency response capacities and mobilizing funding. To achieve these objectives, the establishment of a national solidarity fund has been proposed in order to mobilize the funding necessary for the implementation of humanitarian response plans. The placement of equipment and other emergency inputs in at-risk areas is also essential.

Reply to the question contained in paragraph 22

122. Mauritania has been identified by the African Union as one of the first 10 countries that must conduct two-year campaigns to combat and raise awareness of child marriage.

123. The Government has therefore set up a multisectoral committee to develop and supervise the action plan of this campaign. This committee comprises representatives of key ministries (the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Communication, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Health), of national NGOs and of the United Nations (the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund). The committee has developed a two-year action plan for the campaign against child marriage and the following activities have been carried out:

- Official launch, in all departments of the wilayah of Brakna, of the national campaign to combat child marriage

- Provision of training on combating child marriage to the members of the regional table for the protection of children in Brakna
- Organization and hosting of radio and television programmes on the consequences of child marriage
- Inclusion of combating child marriage on the agenda of the regional tables for the protection of children and the development of a regional action plan on combating child marriage in the wilayah of Brakna

124. As part of the commemorative activities of 16 June, the following initiatives were taken:

- Development of key messages on combating child marriage and child labour
- Provision to 80 stakeholders of training on key messages on combating child marriage and child labour, and the organization of a caravan to raise awareness of the consequences of child marriage and child labour in five wilayahs in the country, namely, Gorgol, Guidimaka, Nouakchott Ouest, Nouakchott Sud and Nouakchott Nord
- Organization and hosting of several radio and television programmes on the consequences of child marriage

125. The following initiatives were taken as part of the commemorative activities of 20 November:

- Organization of a training workshop on the consequences of child marriage for journalists, child protection NGOs, members of the children's parliament, women's cooperatives and youth networks in the wilayah of Dakhlet Nouadhibou. The workshop was led by an imam (Vaghih), a gynaecologist and a sociologist.
- Efforts to raise awareness of the consequences of child marriage in two neighbourhoods of the city of Nouadhibou
- Hosting, by the members of the national committee on combating child marriage, of radio and television programmes on the consequences of child marriage, and the development of communication materials on the matter.
