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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 44 OF THE CONVENTION**

Second periodic reports of States parties due in 1998

MAURITANIA*

[26 November 2007]

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ADB	African Development Bank
BEPC	Certificate of lower secondary education
BHCI	Mauritanian Bank for International Trade
CAC	Community food centre
CIDA	Canadian International Development Association
CNC	Community nutrition centre
CNE	National Council for Children
CREN	Nutritional recovery and education centre
CSP	Personal Status Code
DAS	Department of Social Affairs
EDS	Demographic and health survey
EDSM	Demographic and health survey in Mauritania
GAVI	Global Alliance Vaccination Initiative
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IDA	International Development Association
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
ILO	International Labour Organization
MCPFEF	Ministry for the Advancement of Women, for Children and the Family
MEN	Ministry of National Education
MSAS	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ONS	National Statistics Office
PNDN	National Nutrition Development Policy
PNDPE	National Policy for the Development of Young Children
PNDSE	National Programme for the Development of the Education Sector
PNJ	National Youth Policy
PNSR	National Reproductive Health Programme
SFPR	Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction
STD	Sexually transmitted disease
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

INTRODUCTION

1. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which has been a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter “the Convention”) since 8 April 1991, submits to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereinafter “the Committee”) its second periodic report under article 44 of the Convention.
2. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania reiterates its commitment to the ideals and values embodied in the Convention and wishes to continue and strengthen the constructive dialogue established with the Committee in October 2001 on the occasion of the presentation of its initial report (CRC/C/8/Add.42).
3. The present report outlines the progress made in the legislative, administrative, judicial and other fields in guaranteeing the best interests of the child in the light of the recommendations formulated by the Committee at its twenty-eighth session during its consideration of the initial report (CRC/C/15/Add.159).
4. The Government of Mauritania hopes that the present report will make a further contribution to the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights of Mauritanian children and strengthen the dialogue and discussion with the Committee.

I. GENERAL MEASURES OF APPLICATION (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6)

5. In conformity with article 44, paragraph 4, of the Convention, the present report describes the following developments resulting from the administrative, institutional and juridical measures taken by the authorities since the submission of the initial report on the application of the provisions of the Convention.

A. Measures relating to article 4

6. These measures are designed to improve the protection of children. They include:
 - a) The Personal Status Code (Act No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001), which is intended to promote social progress in terms of the harmonious development of all segments of society, but chiefly women and children, and marks a vital turning point in the reorganization of social relations. This Code accords the rights of the child an important place and provides sufficient guarantees in various areas, such as child support (food, care, housing, clothing), custody and filiation. These provisions enable children to exercise their rights, which are guaranteed by a legal obligation. The most significant point in this reform is the fixing of the age of majority necessary for marriage at 18 years and the rendering of marriage subject to consent, except in cases determined by a judicial decision based on the best interests of the child;
 - b) Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 on compulsory basic education, which was adopted in 2001 as part of the process of incorporating the provisions of the Convention in domestic law. Parents are now obliged, under pain of criminal sanctions, to send their children to school between the ages of six and 14 years;
 - c) Act No. 2004-017 of 6 July 2004 on the Labour Code fixes the minimum age for admission to employment at 14 years and brings all the provisions of the former Code into line with the Convention and with the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) which are more favourable to children. The General Collective

Labour Agreement provides further protection for children against any work prejudicial to their life, health, education or development;

- d) The ratification in 2001 of the ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138, 1973) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182, 1999) and of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict, testifies to the determination of the authorities to accede to all the relevant legal instruments and to make all necessary efforts to ensure children's full development;
- e) The promulgation of Act No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003 on suppression of trafficking in persons, which the State employs to combat and suppress all practices involving exploitation of human beings. This text classifies as crimes certain offences of trafficking in persons which previously had been treated as ordinary offences or misdemeanours. This Act thus constitutes a means of combating child labour;
- f) Order No. 2005-015 of 5 December 2005 on the judicial protection of children accords to minors the various available remedies and sets out the conditions for dealing with children in conflict with the law;
- g) Act No. 2007-042 of 3 September 2007 on the criminalization of slavery and the suppression of practices similar to slavery completes the body of human rights legislation by introducing severe penalties and authorizing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of human rights to appear as parties in legal proceedings and to assist victims of human rights violations. It criminalizes child abduction, the denial of education or of inheritance rights, and child labour;
- h) Order No. 2006-05 of 26 January 2006 on legal assistance establishes a system of access to justice which provides more favourable treatment for the poorest people, especially children, by means of legal assistance and the exercise of rights. It is mandatory for local legal assistance offices to have a children's section;
- i) The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, ratified by Mauritania in 2005, has helped to improve the protection of children against all forms of exploitation, torture and inhuman or degrading treatment;
- j) The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), adopted in 2005, reinforces the legal arsenal for protecting children, especially with regard to the elimination of practices harmful to their health, such as female genital mutilation.

7. Article 80 of the Constitution establishes the primacy of ratified international treaties and conventions over domestic legislation. Citizens are thus able to invoke such international instruments before the courts on the same footing as national laws.

8. The adoption of these important national and international texts constitutes a significant reinforcement of the protection of children.

9. The handling of family disputes by the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, for Children and the Family (MCPFEF) has been improved through the recruitment of human resources and the provision of new equipment, with a view to delivering proper, diligent and speedy responses to complaints from women and children concerning their treatment. Actions

have been brought before the courts and supported by the relevant services and civil society in order to advance the cause of children and protect their rights when necessary.

10. Mauritania's eligibility to receive assistance under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative has led to the mobilization of new resources for its poverty reduction programmes. These programmes have focused on speeding up economic growth and rooting it in the economic world of the poor, on human resources development, and on the expansion of the core social services.

11. The revision of the Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (SFPR) for 2006-2010, its harmonization with the Millennium Development Goals, the incorporation of the childhood dimension in this process, and the formulation of the framework for medium-term expenditure are all facilitating the allocation of additional budgetary resources to the core social sectors.

12. Specific human rights have been accorded a prominent place following the formulation on a participatory basis of the National Plan for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, approved in 2003. This Plan forms part of the international efforts for the universal promotion of human rights, in particular children's rights, in accordance with the Millennium Declaration adopted at the United Nations World Summit.

13. The reform of the education system and the formulation of the ten-year plan for the development of the education system (2000-2010) have produced significant progress in terms of children's access to and retention in the school system.

14. The implementation of an accelerated strategy for children's survival and development is producing important advances in this area.

15. The expansion of the national movement for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child with the participation of all sectors of civil society is increasing still further the attention given to the rights of the child. This national movement is constituted by the following organizations:

- The parliamentary group on children;
- The Assembly of Imams and Ulemas for the Rights of the Child;
- The Association of Journalists for the Rights of the Child;
- The network of religious and traditional leaders, doctors and journalists for the development and survival of children;
- The Children's Parliament.

16. The generation of a true national awareness as a result of the great advocacy effort has led to the adoption of serious measures to tackle children's problems.

17. These new measures are the concrete expression of the policies proposed in the documents "We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children" and "A world fit for children", both adopted at the special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on children, held from 8 to 10 May 2002, at which Mauritania was represented at a high level.

18. At the same time the Government has included an array of measures for children in the PRSF and other medium- and long-term development policies.

19. This approach illustrates the concern of the authorities to place children at the heart of all development programmes and to secure coherence among all public policies, in order to achieve “a world fit for children”.

20. The National Human Rights Commission, established by Order No. 2006-015 of 12 July 2006, constitutes a national framework for discussion among the agencies concerned with questions of human rights and the national NGOs working to promote and protect human rights.

21. In order to provide for the monitoring and analysis of the indicators, data collection arrangements have been established through support for the National Statistics Office (ONS), national capacity building with regard to social planning and monitoring/evaluation, the introduction of the MAURITINFO database, the conduct of efficient multi-indicator cluster surveys (MICS), demographic and health surveys and permanent surveys of household living conditions, and results-based programming. Particular emphasis is given to the production of reliable statistics disaggregated by children’s sex, age and rural, peri-urban or urban area of residence. This governmental effort has enjoyed the technical and financial support of development partners concerned with children’s issues, such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank.

22. The following are the main sources of information:

- General population censuses and periodic ONS surveys such as the permanent survey of household living conditions;
- Sectoral sources (MCPFEF education and health statistics, and youth and employment statistics, etc.);
- Specialized studies and research providing important qualitative and quantitative data on general matters (causes of divorce, family disputes, etc.) or on specific matters (school attendance by girls, street children, persons with disabilities, children in conflict with the law, etc.).

B. Measures relating to article 42

23. According to article 6 of the Constitution, “the national languages are Arabic, Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof”. The Convention is available in Arabic and French. Considerable efforts have been made to disseminate and translate the provisions of the Convention by producing simplified versions in the national languages and conducting widespread publicity campaigns among all the country’s ethnic groups.

24. Much use has been made of community and rural radio services in these efforts to disseminate the provisions of the Convention. In addition, the vast network of community relay stations and the integrated communication centres have helped to publicize the content of the Convention and the national legislation. These activities have been backed up by the conduct of large-scale communication campaigns designed to change behaviour.

25. Civil society groups and professionals with responsibilities in the children’s sector (opinion formers, members of Parliament, civil servants, judges and other judiciary personnel, health

personnel, locally elected representatives, political decision-makers, etc.) have received appropriate training in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

26. The provisions of the Convention and the national legislation entailing responsibilities for various ministerial departments, civil society and the National Council for Children are disseminated through traditional and institutional communication channels (radio, television, press, posters, sketches, theatrical productions, talks, etc.). At the same time the Government is endeavouring to combat retrograde attitudes at variance with the teaching of Islam. These efforts have led to the establishment of a large number of national and local networks for the defence of children's rights.

27. A module on the rights of the child has been incorporated in the curricula of schools, universities, professional bodies and security services (police and gendarmerie schools). This will firmly implant respect for children's rights.

C. Measures relating to article 44, paragraph 6

28. The present report was compiled and approved by an inter-ministerial committee consisting of representatives of the various departments concerned and civil society organizations working on the basis of a participatory and consensus approach. The approval process gave rise to the organization by the ministry responsible for children's affairs of several workshops and seminars, with the support of UNICEF and civil society.

II. DEFINITION OF THE CHILD (art. 1)

29. The first paragraph of article 1 of Order No. 2005-015 of 5 December 2005 on the judicial protection of children defines the child as "any person aged between 0 and 18 years". Act No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001 on compulsory basic education made it compulsory for children to attend school between the ages of six and 14 years. Pursuant to article 6 of Act No. 2001-052 of 19 July 2001 on the Personal Status Code, "the legal capacity to marry is possessed by all persons of sound mind aged at least 18 years".

30. Where employment is concerned, according to article 158 of Act No. 2004-017 of 6 July 2004 on the Labour Code, children under the age of 21 must undergo a compulsory medical examination, while article 160 stipulates medical checks every six months for children aged under 18. This Act sets the minimum age for admission to employment at 14 years and brings all the provisions of the former Code into line with those of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ILO conventions which are more favourable to children. The General Collective Labour Agreement provides children with further protection against any work prejudicial to their life, health, education or development.

31. The Act on compulsory basic education also provides that school attendance between the ages of six and 14 years is compulsory for children of both sexes for a total period equal to at least six years.

32. National legislation provides for deprivation of liberty for minors but it also makes provision for the establishment of placement facilities for them to ensure that their dignity is respected throughout the judicial process. One example of such facilities is the Beyla Centre in Nouakchott.

33. Decree No. 2005-022 of 3 March 2005 on the modalities for application of the refugee conventions ratified by Mauritania accords to refugee children all the guarantees provided by those conventions.

34. With regard to civil and criminal proceedings involving children, the MCPFEF Family Disputes Service and a number of NGOs help to defend the cause of children and protect their rights in the courts.

35. Where civil cases are concerned, article 163 of the Personal Status Code provides that “an individual who lacks the faculty of discernment owing to his youth or alienation is legally incapable of exercising his civil rights”. This provision is supplemented by article 164: “A person who reaches the age of discernment before reaching the age of majority does not enjoy full legal capacity”.

36. With regard to legal representation, article 176 of the Code, supplemented by articles 177-184, provides that “the legal representation of a person lacking legal capacity shall be provided by the statutory, testamentary or dative guardianship service”. The Code accords the right of inheritance to male and female children under the conditions set out in articles 251 and 252.

III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12)

A. Non-discrimination (art. 2)

37. The legislation and regulations in force do not contain any discriminatory provisions. For example, article 1 of the Constitution states: “Mauritania is an Islamic, democratic, indivisible and social republic which accords all its citizens equality before the law without distinction as to origin, race, sex or social status”. The principle of non-discrimination is also asserted in several other legislative and regulatory texts.

38. In this connection, since 1987 Mauritania has been working to restructure the system of education and training, giving emphasis to expanding basic education, reinforcing technical and vocational training, and reorganizing higher education.

39. In this spirit, the principle of the equality of the sexes at the various levels of education (pre-school, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, and higher) is guaranteed by national legislation.

40. Order No. 081-212 of 24 September 1981 on the status of private education guarantees pupils and students in the private system the same conditions as are provided in public education.

41. Article 1 of Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 on the reform of the education system states: “The education dispensed at the various levels of basic, secondary and higher education is unified. It is provided under the same conditions to all the pupils and students enrolled in the nation’s schools and universities, both public and private”.

42. These provisions are supplemented by those of article 5 of the Act: “Vocational training schools have been opened in the regions, in the light of the economic vocation of each region, with the aim, inter alia, of catering for the maximum number of those students who have been unable to attend secondary school”.

43. Equality between the sexes at the various levels of education is also affirmed in Act No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001 on compulsory basic education, article 1 of which states that “basic education is compulsory for all boys and girls between the ages of six and 14 years for a total period of school attendance equal to at least six years. This education is dispensed in public and private institutions, *mahadras* [see para. 55 below] or any other duly approved education establishment”.

44. The National Policy for the Development of Young Children (PNDPE), with its emphasis on the various aspects of the promotion and protection of children, was adopted in 2005; it is currently being implemented by means of programmes focused on the expansion of pre-school education, the protection of children in difficult situations, and the coordination and monitoring of the measures for improvement of the core social services.

45. The PNDPE asserts the following principles:

- Indivisibility of the rights of the child;
- Non-discrimination between children in the current programmes;
- Incorporation of the concept of the best interests of the child in all the measures;
- Reduction of social inequalities between children in the 0-8 age group;
- Recognition and strengthening of the priority roles of the family and the community in the development of young children;
- Implementation of measures to benefit girls and women as favourable influences in the development of young children;
- Rooting of the measures adopted in the specific cultural features of Mauritania;
- Guarantees of the quality as well as the quantity of the services provided;
- Harmonization of the PNDPE programmes with other national policies and strategies;

46. Equality between the sexes is also formally established with regard to the curricula, examinations, personnel and facilities of schools and universities.

47. For example, several articles of Order No. 081-212 of 24 September 1981 on the status of private education address these various components. The first paragraph of article 1 of the Order states that “the curricula and timetables of private schools must be consistent with those of the corresponding public schools”.

48. In addition, paragraph 1 of article 13 of the Order addresses in detail the conditions for the enrolment of pupils and students by private schools, which must be “consistent with those of the corresponding public schools”. Paragraph 2 adds that “private schools are required to ensure that the pupils and students whom they enrol will normally be able to benefit from the envisaged education or training and obtain the diplomas or other qualifications which they are entitled to expect to obtain on graduation”.

49. According to paragraph 1 of article 14 of the Order, private schools are supervised by “members of the monitoring and inspection services of basic, secondary and technical education, the schools health and hygiene service, and the administrative authorities”. Paragraph 2 provides that these supervisory powers shall be exercised “with respect to teaching, health and hygiene,

and security in such a way as to ensure that pupils enjoy good physical and moral conditions in the schools”.

50. Where curricula are concerned, the principle of equality between the sexes is established in Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 on the reform of the education system. Article 6 of this Act states that “the first cycle of secondary education shall be increased to four years in order to prepare the pupils in question better, either to continue their studies in the second cycle of secondary education or to enrol in schools and other establishments of secondary vocational training”.

51. Act No. 2001-054 on compulsory basic education emphasizes access to schools when it states that “children living in places not provided with education facilities shall be enrolled in the nearest schools by the administrative, municipal and school authorities in question”.

52. The young children’s sector has made significant progress since the adoption of the PNDPE in improving the access of very young children, especially the poorest ones, to the various modes of education and day-care, in developing a system for training infants in pre-school facilities, and in expanding the young children’s networks. For example, the Young Children’s Teacher Training Centre, a national agency responsible for training infant teachers, has been in operation since 2003 and has already graduated more than 300 kindergarten teachers.

53. In order to ensure good conditions of education, the Government awards scholarships to certain categories of pupil and student. These are pupils and students who come from poor backgrounds or have been displaced from their home regions and students intending to study at foreign universities.

54. The procedures for the award of scholarships have been revised in favour of girls and of children from the poorer strata of society.

Table 1. School attendance, by sex (percentages)*

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
6-11			
Male	60.4	37.1	45.9
Female	57.5	33.6	42.4
Ratio	104.9	110.4	108.4
12-17			
Male	68.7	39.8	52.3
Female	66.0	29.1	44.8
Ratio	104.0	137.0	116.8
6-17			
Male	64.2	38.2	48.6
Female	61.7	31.7	43.4
Ratio	104.0	120.6	111.9

<i>Age group</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Total</i>
18-21			
Male	39.2	16.7	29.1
Female	35.6	9.3	21.9
Ratio	110.2	181.0	132.9
22-24			
Male	23.9	8.4	17.9
Female	16.4	4.1	9.8
Ratio	145.5	205.8	182.7

* Percentage of (actual) population of households in the 6-24 age group in formal education, disaggregated by place of residence and by certain socio-demographic characteristics.

Source: EDSM, 2000-2001.

55. Traditional education makes a big contribution to the literacy efforts. It is provided in non-formal schools known as *mahadras*. The *mahadras* also have a pre-school function, for they are attended by very young children.

56. All children are protected against acts of discrimination by Act No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003 on suppression of trafficking in persons, while the Government also provides refugee children, following the adoption of Decree No. 2005-022 of 3 March 2005 on refugees, with all the guarantees contained in the conventions to which Mauritania is a party, especially where non-discrimination is concerned. Pursuant to this Decree, the National Consultative Commission on Refugees was established in 2006 under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior. Its membership is drawn from the relevant ministerial departments and other public bodies. It takes decisions on the individual situation of asylum applicants. Applicants granted refugee status enjoy all the rights deriving from the conventions in question, without any discrimination. In addition, an inter-ministerial committee has been created to prepare for the organized and voluntary return to Mauritania, under the best possible conditions, of Mauritanian refugees in general and of their children, in particular from the camps in Mali and Senegal.

B. Best interests of the child (art. 3)

57. The best interests of the child are taken into account in the legislation and regulations and in the action taken in the field. Several articles of Act No. 2001-052 of 17 July 2001 on the Personal Status Code guarantee children favourable treatment: article 152 on support for maintenance deriving from parenthood, articles 176-188 on legal representation, and articles 189-194 on intervention by the courts.

58. With a view to protecting children against all acts of exploitation, article 2 of Act No. 2003-025 (suppression of trafficking in persons) stipulates sanctions to be imposed on perpetrators of the criminal acts referred to in articles 1 and 2.

59. Programmes are being carried out to prevent and protect against risks to health. For example, for several years now expanded programmes on immunization have been executed to protect children against the commonest diseases.

C. Respect for the views of the child (art. 12)

60. Freedom of opinion is guaranteed by article 10 of the Constitution of 20 July 1991. The Children's Parliament was established in 2007 following the conduct of several workshops on this question: it constitutes a platform for the free expression of opinions and for debate and organizes practical exercises on democratic values and acceptance of other people. This Parliament, which is composed of representatives from all regions of the country, was established at a special session of the National Assembly. The President of the Republic and the Prime Minister affirmed, at interviews granted to the Parliament's officers, their commitment to respect for the views of children in the process of formulating and implementing development policies. The public media allow children to air their views in special broadcasts.

IV. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

A. Name and nationality (art. 7)

61. Awareness-raising campaigns on the right to have births registered have been carried out by the authorities and civil society organizations in rural areas having low rates of registration. The rates have risen following the upgrading of the equipment of local civil registration services and the working conditions of their staff.

B. The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (art. 37 (a))

62. The ratification in 2001 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment led to the incorporation of provisions protecting children against such practices in order No. 2005-021 on the judicial protection of children.

V. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

A. Parental guidance (art. 5)

63. The Constitution declares that the family is the nucleus and basis of society. Article 16 states that "the State and society shall protect the family". The Personal Status Code is founded on parental responsibility for their children. In this connection, article 120 of the Act establishing the Code states that "the mother is required to breastfeed her child and the father to provide food for it during the period of breastfeeding". These provisions are supplemented by those of article 123, paragraph 1, which stipulates that "custody of the child is one of the obligations of its father and mother for as long as they remain married", while article 123, paragraph 3, spells out the conditions under which custody may be entrusted to members of the extended family.

64. Article 142, paragraph 2, provides that "with regard to the child's maintenance, the housing conditions must satisfy the requirements specified in article 122, paragraph 8". The State is carrying out through the media parent education programmes focused on the roles and responsibilities of parents where their children are concerned.

65. The National Plan of Action for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights adopted in 2005 addresses all aspects of human rights, including those relating to the proper development of children and the protection of their well-being. A number of measures have been carried out in this connection, including the dissemination of the Personal Status Code, support for the arrangements for dealing with family disputes, execution of parent education programmes, etc.

66. The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, as updated for the period 2005 -008, has facilitated the conduct of information, education and communication campaigns to advance the status of women and children.

B. Parental responsibilities (art. 18, paras. 1 and 2)

67. Parental responsibility is defined explicitly in Act No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001 on compulsory basic education. Article 1 of the Act stipulates compulsory primary education for all children “of both sexes between the ages of six and 14 years for a total period of school attendance equal to at least six years”.

68. Under this Act the person responsible for the child, who may be the father, mother or legal guardian or any other physical or juridical person having legal responsibility for the child’s custody is required to enrol the child within a 15-day period before the start of the school year (art. 2). Failure to do so after a grace period of five day triggers severe penalties for the person concerned.

69. According to article 10, these penalties range from a fine of 10,000 to 30,000 ouguiyas when this person, without a valid reason, refuses to enrol the child or keeps the child away from school for more than 15 days in one term and causes the child to suffer “by his influence and actions a temporary or permanent interruption of education”. The fine may be increased to 50,000 or even 100,000 ouguiyas if the offence is repeated.

70. In the context of parental responsibility Mauritanian law imposes on parents an array of obligations with regard to education, health and maintenance, all designed to benefit the child; failure to meet these obligations gives rise to monetary penalties and/or deprivation of liberty under Order No. 2005-015 of 5 December 2005 on the judicial protection of children.

71. Some communes located in remote areas have been provided with bus services for girls to facilitate the continuation of their attendance at school. Reduced fares are charged by urban transport systems for all pupils and students in order to reduce the financial burden on their parents.

72. The National Sickness Insurance Fund (CNAM) created by Order No. 2005-006 of 29 September 2005 is designed to provide health cover for civil servants and retired persons and their children.

73. The State carries out other measures to help other categories of children in special situations, in particular children with disabilities and all children likely to experience difficulties because they come from poor backgrounds.

74. The establishment of the Commissariat for Social Protection and Food Security is helping to bolster the efforts to deal with poverty and assist persons with disabilities and the elderly.

75. A 2006 Order on assisting and protecting persons with disabilities accords equality of opportunities to this vulnerable and disadvantaged group.

76. The political will to improve the situation of persons with disabilities, particularly children, is borne out by the conduct of a census of disabled persons in 2005 in Nouakchott with a view to establishing a database, introducing a grass-roots re-education programme in conjunction with the deaf-blind school, and boosting the efforts to make parents more aware of the harmful effects of

their own lack of information on the lives of their children. In this connection, NGOs are carrying out important measures in the field.

Table 2. Distribution of disabled children, by sex and by district of Nouakchott

<i>District</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Teyarett	100	40	140
Ksar	16	9	25
Tevragh Zeina	39	33	72
Toujounine	55	46	101
Sebkha	149	107	256
El Mina	146	94	240
Dar Naïm	99	72	171
Arafat	110	63	173
Riyad	94	79	173
Total	808	543	1 351

Source: DAS.

77. Of the total of 1,351 children covered by the census, 656 were aged between one and 10 years, including 435 aged under seven. There were 679 children in the 11-18 age group, including 118 aged 15, 100 aged 16, 97 aged 17, and 78 aged 14. The others were mostly late-adolescents and young adults aged between 19 and 23.

78. Despite the almost full vaccination coverage, the overwhelming majority (905) of the children with disabilities were born in Nouakchott. This location was followed, in descending order, by Trarza (74), Brakna (73), Gorgol (37), Assaba (28), Hodh Chargui (23), Tagant (17), Adrar (14), Hodh El Gharbi (12) and Dakhlet Nouadhibou (10). The regions of Guidimakha (8), Tiris Zemour and Inchiri (both 5) had the fewest children with disabilities. Some of the disabled children had been born in neighbouring countries, such as Senegal (38) and Mali (3). But children of Mauritanian nationality were by far the most numerous (1,308 out of a total of 1,351), followed by Senegalese (23), Guineans (5) and Malians (4).

C. Separation from parents (art. 9)

79. According to article 123 of Act No. 2001-052 of 17 July 2001 on the Personal Status Code, “custody of the child is one of the obligations of the father and mother for as long as they remain married. If the marriage is dissolved, custody is awarded by preference to the mother”. Paragraph 2 of this article specifies in order of preference, against the event that the mother cannot take custody, the other persons authorized to do so. And article 122 specifies the conditions which must be met by such persons.

80. With regard to parent-child relations following separation, article 134 states that “when custody of a child is entrusted to one of the parents, the other parent may not be prevented from visiting the child or from obtaining information about the child’s situation. Furthermore, the other

parent may claim the right to be visited by the child at least once a week, unless the court orders otherwise in the child's interest".

D. Family reunification (art. 10)

81. Articles 10 and 22 of the Constitution guarantee everyone the freedom to live in and to enter and leave the national territory. And Mauritania has ratified the refugee conventions.

E. Illicit transfer and non-return (art. 11)

82. Act No 2003-025 of 17 July 2003 on suppression of trafficking in persons establishes penalties to prevent such practices. In 2005 Mauritania ratified the Additional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

F. Recovery of maintenance for the child (art. 27, para. 4)

83. This matter is addressed in several of the articles of Act No. 2001-052. Article 141, for example, provides that the status of parent renders contribution to maintenance obligatory.

84. Article 142 states that "contribution to maintenance covers the provision of food, clothing, shelter and everything else traditionally regarded as necessary". Paragraph 2 of this article states that "with regard to the provision of maintenance for the child, the accommodation must satisfy the requirements of article 122, paragraph 8, of the present Act".

85. As to the amount of the maintenance, article 144 provides that "for the purposes of fixing the amount of the contribution to maintenance, account shall be taken of the assets of the person from whom the maintenance is due, the needs of the claimant, the cost of living, and human requirements". Any failure to fulfil obligations in this regard is subject to the penalties specified in the Criminal Code, in accordance with article 146 of the Personal Status Code. In any event, the amount of the maintenance may not be increased or reduced until one year has elapsed (art. 148).

86. However, article 152 of the Code sets out a number of procedures which come into play when the parent in question lacks sufficient resources. Furthermore, the contribution to maintenance ceases as soon as the child is able to provide for its own needs (art. 152, para. 3). Articles 159-161 address the question of contribution to maintenance by third parties. Article 159 states that "anyone who has an obligation to a third party to make a contribution to that party's maintenance for a specified period must fulfil the obligation. If the period is not specified, the court shall fix it in accordance with custom".

87. Article 160 states that "any person authorized by a court to take responsibility for an abandoned child who has no assets shall contribute to the child's maintenance until the child is capable of earning its own living". And article 161 provides that "any person having excess resources shall assist a person in need". The district courts of the 54 departments have handed down several judicial decisions awarding maintenance to children of divorced parents to be paid by their fathers.

G. Children deprived of a family environment (art. 20)

88. A centre for the protection and social integration of children in difficult situations was created by Decree No. 2007-184 of 1 November 2007 in the form of a public administrative institution. This institution targets street children, children forced to beg or subject to economic exploitation, children referred by the courts, etc. The National Council for Children and the Children and Development Association of Mauritania (AEDM) conducted surveys of the situation of street children in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou in 2003 and 2007 which provided a clearer picture of the situation and living conditions of this category of children. In addition, juvenile judges have been trained and special juvenile courts have been established in the 13 chief towns of the regions. And the Department of Prisons Administration of the Ministry of Justice runs a centre for the social integration and reintegration of children in conflict with the law (the Beyla Centre in Nouakchott). The work of the public authorities is supported by civil society. A minors' unit consisting of officers trained in child protection carries out preventive measures against acts of juvenile delinquency and attends to the needs of such juveniles, as well as providing services for children in conflict with the law in accordance with the international standards.

H. Adoption (art. 21)

89. Mauritanian law does not recognize adoption but it does provide for *kafalah*, under which a person takes charge of a child's education, food, protection and other needs without ever establishing a filial relationship.

I. Periodic review of placement (art. 25)

90. Children placed in the Beyla Detention Centre (see para. 88 above) are provided with training and other assistance by certain NGOs working with children who commit or fall victim to criminal offences. The situation of children deprived of their liberty is subject to periodic review, under the re-education arrangements, by a commission responsible for monitoring and evaluating the conduct of such children.

J. Abuse and neglect (art. 19), including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

91. Several articles of the Criminal Code penalize acts of violence committed against children and the abuse or neglect of children. Articles 323, 325, paragraph 1, and 326-331 address crimes and offences against minors, while articles 332, 333, paragraphs 1-3, and 334-335 deal specifically with child abduction.

92. Articles 336 and 337 set out the penalties which may be imposed on persons guilty of neglecting or abusing their children. These articles reinforce the provisions of Act No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003 on suppression of trafficking in persons, articles 1-5 of which accord children protection against all forms of exploitation.

93. The authorities are planning to alter the arrangements for detention of children in conflict with the law by establishing re-education centres. Two systems of re-education are envisaged: the closed or residential regime, which gives the educational personnel the necessary time to prepare children in conflict with the law for social reintegration; and the open regime, which allows partial liberty and gives emphasis to prevention and educational assistance.

VI. BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

A. Children with disabilities (art. 23)

94. The Government has formulated a national policy for persons with disabilities and entrusted its implementation to the Commissariat for Social Protection and Food Security.

95. The advocacy of the National Council for Children on behalf of disabled children resulted in the mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities in the National Plan of Action for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

96. The National Programme for Development of the Education Sector (PNDSE) and the National Policy for the Development of Young Children (PNDPE) contain components on special education and several measures for meeting the specific needs of disabled children. The Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (SFPR) establishes safety nets for the most disadvantaged groups, among them “children in difficult situations, including children with physical and mental disabilities”.

97. There are several agencies providing assistance for persons with disabilities:

- The Nouakchott Neuropsychiatric Centre, for persons with mental disabilities;
- The National Orthopaedic and Functional Rehabilitation Centre, which has orthopaedic, kinesitherapy and monitoring services to attend to the functional rehabilitation of persons with physical disabilities and provide equipment at reasonable cost (this Centre has opened regional units);
- The Commissariat for Social Protection and Food Security covers the costs of hospital treatment, equipment and travel for treatment for indigent children with disabilities;
- The National Institute for the Blind and the Centre for Deaf-Mute Education run Braille literacy and mobility programmes for the blind;
- Since 2000 Nouakchott has had a day-care and education centre for young children with disabilities;
- A medical/educational centre for mentally defective persons, which has been working since 2000 with mentally defective and disabled children, including some girls.

98. There are many NGOs working for the welfare of persons with disabilities, in particular by supporting the manufacture of orthopaedic devices, providing funding for the treatment of certain disabled persons, and operating specialized assistance facilities.

B. Health and health services (art. 24)

99. The PRSF treats health as a decisive factor in improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable groups.

100. The authorities have adopted several health plans and programmes and have allocated them considerable resources.

Table 3. Evolution of public spending on health (millions of ouguiyas)

<i>YEAR</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>
Operating costs	2 287	2 341	2 641	5 124
Investments	2 884	2 800	2 235	5 558
Total spending	5 171	5 187	4 876	10 682
Percentage of GDP	2.5	2.32		
Ouguiyas/inhabitant	2 013	1 961	1 865	3 985
\$US/inhabitant	8.00	8.20	8.00	15.00

Source: CBMT 2002/2004, 20/20 studies, and MSAS review 2003.

101. The medium-term budget framework (CBMT) for 2002-2004 was prepared on the basis of the strategies for the health sector set out in the PRSF.

102. Several priority programmes are being implemented. Human and financial resources have been increased in the light of the direct impact of these programmes on the health of mothers and children.

103. The reference framework of the National Reproductive Health Programme (PNSR) is based on the fulfilment by the Government of its international commitments to assist women and children.

104. The Strategic Reproductive Health Plan (2003-2007) was formulated to improve the coordination and integration of the activities and to establish their institutional roots. This Plan concentrates on combating maternal and neonatal morbidity, encouraging the spacing of births and family planning, and generally improving reproductive health.

105. The prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, the improvement of adolescent health, the expansion of awareness-raising activities, the initiation of measures to prevent mother-to-child transmission, and the proclamation of a national reproductive health week in Mauritania all offer happy prospects of a healthier future for mothers and children. Through these measures the Government intends to improve reproductive health, including the neonatal mortality and morbidity rates (747 maternal deaths per 100,000 births; 53 per cent of pregnant women suffering from anaemia; infant mortality rate of 74 per 1,000, and an infant/child mortality rate of 116 per 1,000).

106. At the same time, the use of antenatal services has increased sharply, to 65 per cent in 2000 (EDSM 2000-2001), even if some disparities unfortunately persist in terms of environment, place of residence and standard of education, together with a low rate of anti-tetanus vaccination (24%) among women of childbearing age. The proportion of attended births has also risen sharply, to 57 per cent in 2001 according to the EDSM. Again according to the EDSM, eight per cent of married women have used contraception.

107. The fight against HIV/AIDS (the current incidence stands at about one per cent) is one of the health priorities.

108. Important measures have been introduced to this end, including:

- The creation of a national committee to coordinate the National Programme to Combat AIDS chaired by the Health Minister; its membership consists of representatives of 11 ministries and of civil society;
- The establishment of a parliamentary group to combat STDs and AIDS;
- Improvement of the safety of blood transfusions by establishing a national blood transfusion centre, adopting a national blood transfusion policy and strengthening the testing capacity;
- The establishment of two confidential screening units, in Nouakchott and Kiffa;
- The creation of teams of educators in several regions;
- The establishment of two national NGO networks to combat AIDS;
- The incorporation of an HIV/AIDS programme in the Mauritania/UNICEF programme of cooperation, with two youth components: prevention of mother-to-child transmission; and orphans and other vulnerable children.

109. Several campaigns have been launched to make the general public more aware of the ways of transmitting and preventing this disease and of its social and economic implications. These campaigns have been led and supported by health workers, grass-roots associations, young people, the media, members of parliament, and *imams* in their Friday sermons.

110. The AIDS Act adopted in 2007 is designed to improve the protection of infected persons and the control of the pandemic.

111. In 2002 the Government, in collaboration with its main partners, formulated a strategic framework for the period 2003-2007 to consolidate the national response to this pandemic and coordinate the implementation of the measures to combat it, on the basis of a multisectoral and decentralized approach which takes into account the commitments contained in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted at the special session of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV/AIDS (25 to 27 June 2001).

112. Appropriate budgetary allocations have been made by the Government and its partners to support the fight against AIDS.

113. A strategic plan for the period 2002-2006 was adopted in 2002 to reinforce the measures to combat malaria and reduce its mortality and morbidity rates. This plan aims to reduce mortality by at least 30 per cent and morbidity by 50 per cent of the 2001 rates by focusing on the areas where this disease is most prevalent. A programme has been carried out for the widespread distribution of impregnated mosquito nets in all parts of the country, backed by awareness-raising campaigns and training in impregnation techniques.

114. The fight against tuberculosis has made progress thanks to the introduction of a national programme which provides free anti-tuberculosis drugs throughout the country. This programme is backed by an appropriate communication strategy.

115. The accessibility of the health services has improved markedly: the current rate of coverage is estimated at 73 per cent of the population within a radius of five kilometres of the health facility. The hospital infrastructure has been considerably improved by the opening of the regional hospital in Nouadhibou (the economic capital) and the renovation and re-equipment of

several other regional hospitals. The liberalization of this sector has also made a clear contribution to the upgrading of the services.

116. A central medicines procurement unit was created by Decree No. 14-02 of 2 March 2002 to ensure a regular supply of essential products to health facilities.

117. The efforts to expand the coverage of the health services have led to considerable improvement, in general terms, in all the public health indicators. According to the demographic and health survey (EDS). The infant mortality rate fell from 181 to 123 per 1,000 between 1995 and 2003 and the maternal mortality rate from 930 to 747 per 100,000 births between 1995 and 2000, while the attended birth rate reached 57 per cent, and 65 per cent of mothers were cared for in a medical facility.

Table 4. Reproductive health (percentages)

	<i>Nouakchott</i>	<i>Other urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>National</i>
Antenatal care (women aged between 15 and 49 giving birth during the preceding year)	83.8	85.0	49.8	64.6
Delivery attended by trained personnel (doctors, nurses, midwives)	92.0	81.9	33.3	56.9
Use of contraception by women	13.1	9.6	0.6	5.1

Source: EDSM 2000/01.

118. These results were obtained as a result of measures to build human resources capacity and provide proper equipment and materials and consumables with a view to meeting in full the need for reproductive health services (including emergency obstetrical treatment) and to providing primary health care for new-born babies, with particular emphasis on reinforcing and encouraging the integrated management of childhood illness.

Table 5. Vaccination coverage, 2000-2003* (percentages)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Children aged 0-11 months</i>						<i>ATV2+</i>		<i>Ratios</i>
	<i>BCG</i>	<i>DTP1</i>	<i>DTP2</i>	<i>DTP3</i>	<i>CPOX</i>	<i>POLIO3</i>	<i>FG</i>	<i>FNG</i>	
2000	48	45	36	31	28	31	17	2	54
2001	70	82	67	61	58	58	31	11	93
2002	98	99	85	83	81	80	40	24	90
2003*	80	79	70	67	63	66	35	13	80

* Up to 30 November 2003.

Source: MSAS.

119. Regular epidemiological monitoring reveals a large decline in cases of measles, from 6,555 in 2000 to 883 in 2002. In order to drive this figure even lower, in 2003 the Government increased the funds allocated for combating measles. Efforts have also been made to eradicate poliomyelitis, measles and maternal neonatal tetanus, for which the vaccination coverage reached 99.9 per cent in 2002, with a consequent decline in physical disabilities.

120. The Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) enjoys financial support from the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI). The cost of the vaccines is met by the State.

121. The ratios of doctors and paramedical personnel are close to the standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO), with one doctor for every 7,806 inhabitants and one nurse for every 2,172, as against the standards for these categories of 1:6,760 and 1:2,180 respectively.

122. In order to tackle the regional disparities in the coverage of the health services, which work to the detriment of rural areas, since 2002 the Government has been allocating incentive premiums for geographical areas and skills, the amounts of which are determined by the criteria of remoteness and accessibility.

123. These efforts are designed to eradicate childhood diseases, in particular fevers (31%), diarrhoeas (10%) and acute respiratory infections (18%); the efforts are being continued.

124. Some 35 per cent of children suffer from chronic malnutrition. The fight against this scourge has been made one of the priorities of the National Nutrition Development Policy (PNDN) adopted by the Government in 2005.

125. The nutritional situation is characterized by very widespread protein/energy malnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and the consequent morbidity. The various surveys conducted in this area paint a rather worrying picture. The EDSM 2000-2001 revealed that over 35 per cent of under-fives suffer from chronic malnutrition and 17 per cent from severe malnutrition.

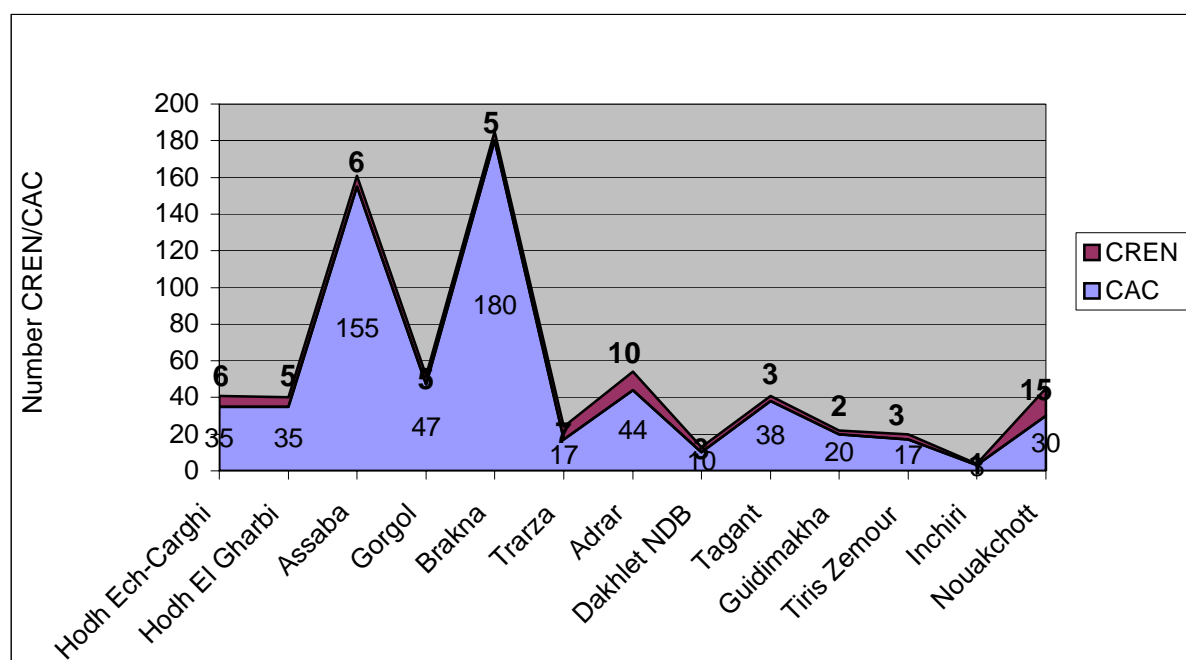
126. The PNDN is now providing a suitable response to the country's nutritional problems, constituting a reference framework within which the Government, its development partners and civil society can pool their efforts to secure the people's well-being. The PNDN has the following four main focuses:

- Food security;
- Nutrition in the health services;
- Grass-roots nutrition and young children's programme;
- School nutrition.

A total of 67 per cent of the health centres and 17 per cent of the health posts conduct screening for malnutrition using anthropometric parameters.

127. Measures to combat the various forms of malnutrition have been introduced by several ministerial departments. The Ministry of Health, for example, has designed and implemented nutrition programmes. The measures to combat malnutrition are carried out by nutritional recovery and education centres (CRENs) and community food centres (CACs), which operate in the health facilities.

Figure 1.
Distribution of CRENs/CACs by region in 2003



Source: DPS/MSAS.

The country's 702 CRENs and CACs provide nutritional services for 19,325 children, an average of 27 children per centre: this corresponds to a coverage rate of 2.8 per cent for children aged six and under.

128. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education also contributes to this effort through its school canteens. Its efforts to combat malnutrition through the school canteens have the support of the World Food Programme (WFP). This support amounted to 440.6 million ouguiyas in 2002. In that same year the school canteens programme served 1,316 schools in eight regions (the two Hodhs, Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna, Trarza, Tagant and Guidimakha). The canteens served 64,580 meals, including 62,600 in primary schools and 1,980 in *mahadras* and Islamic institutes. In so doing they covered 40.3 per cent of basic education schools and 16.7 per cent of all pupils in basic education.

129. The canteens in *mahadras* and Islamic institutions accounted for 4.6 per cent of the total. It is thus clear that there is a large deficit in terms of the coverage of primary schools, in particular in traditional schools.

130. The Commissariat for Social Protection and Food Security (CSA) has made permanent arrangements to guarantee the people's food security. Ad hoc measures are also carried out in the event of emergencies or disasters.

131. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women, for Children and the Family has carried out a second phase of the old grass-roots food security project based on strengthening and expanding communication at the grass roots to improve the nutrition of children and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Figure 2. Number of canteens/meals per region

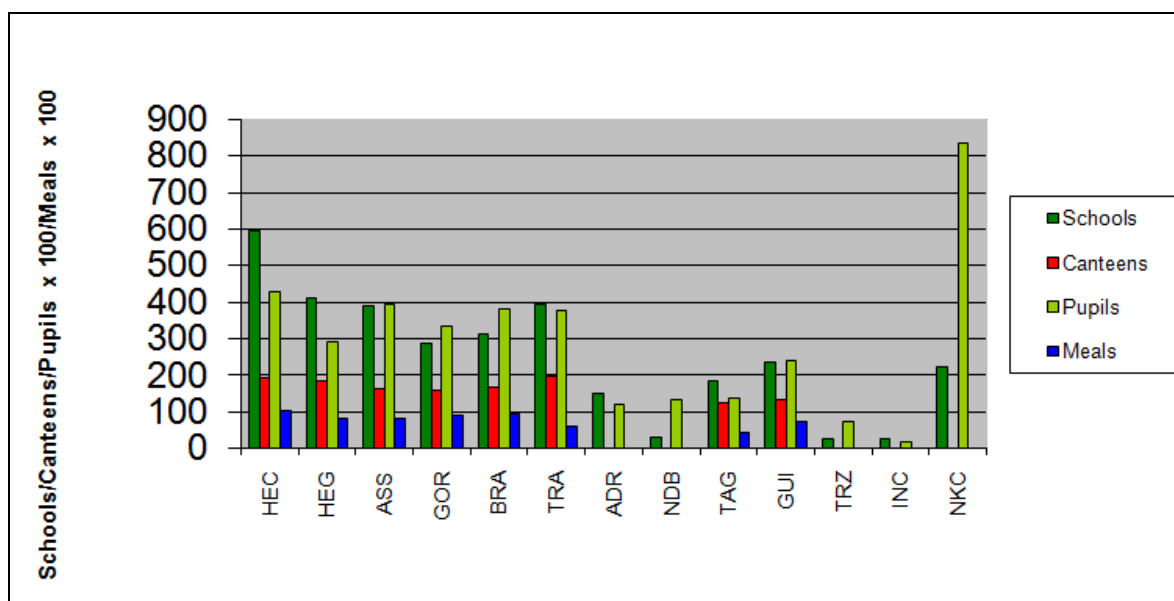


Table 6. Principal nutrition indicators

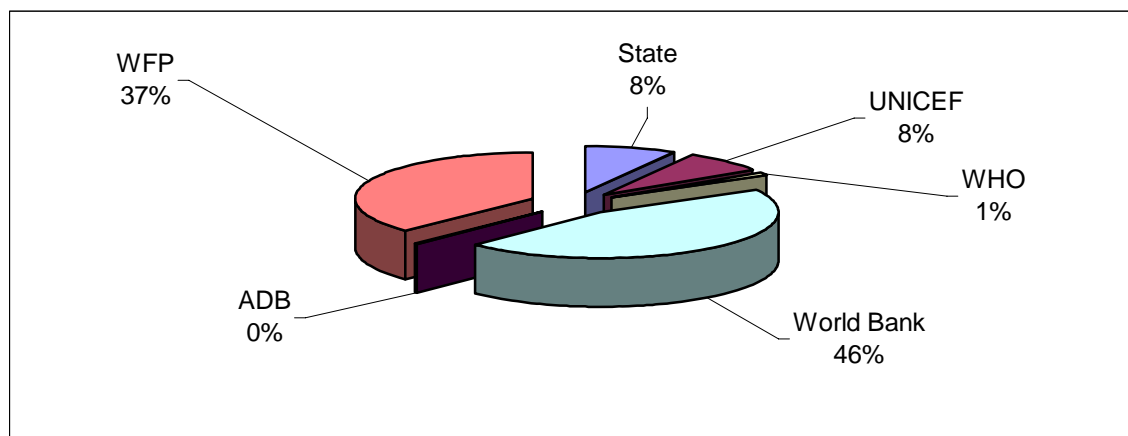
<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Regional average (Sub-Saharan Africa)</i>	<i>Source of data</i>
Rate of iron-deficiency anaemia in pregnant women	53%		PNSR/MSAS
Low birth-weight	9.2%	15%	EDSM 2000-2001
Malnutrition			
Chronic	35%	-	
Severe	17%	-	
Under-weight	32%	20.5%	
Retarded growth	35%	37%	
Emaciation	13%	10%	
Maternal breastfeeding			
Exclusively breastfed (0-6 months)	21.6%	34%	
Plus weaning foods	96.7%	60%	
Still breastfed (20-23 months)	49.6%	52%	
Coverage of vitamin-A supplement	57.8%	54%	
Proportion of households using iodized salt	1.1%	64%	

The low rate of use of iodized salt is part of the reason for the high incidence of ailments caused by iodine deficiency.

132. The (State and donor) financing mobilized to combat malnutrition totalled 1,185.85 million ouguiyas in 2002. This amount does not include funds mobilized by the Commissariat for Social Protection and Food Security. These funds are found by the Departments of Health, Education, and Advancement of Women for the various nutrition programmes, in particular under the school canteens project, the Nutricom project and the National Nutrition Development Programme. WFP

makes its contribution to the fight against malnutrition through the Ministry of Basic Education by supplying foodstuffs under the school canteens project.

Figure 3. Distribution of the budget to combat malnutrition 2002, by source of funding



133. Maternal breastfeeding is widespread in Mauritania, with a higher rate in rural areas. However, exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life is not the rule, and other foods are often introduced at an early stage. The Ministry of Health has carried out strategies designed inter alia:

- To build up the national capacity to monitor and evaluate the nutritional situation;
- To incorporate food and nutrition considerations in the development objectives;
- To improve the quality and safety of food products;
- To attend to persons who are disadvantaged in socio-economic and nutritional terms;
- To train personnel;
- To increase the supply of information and communicate it to the people;
- To strengthen the institutional framework and intersectoral relations.

134. In addition to these general measures, other specific measures have been implemented to combat micronutrient deficiencies. For example, the blindness prevention programme has been reactivated to combat avitaminosis. Action has also been taken to combat iodine deficiency: for example, the adoption of a decree in 2005 on the production, marketing and use of iodized salt in human and animal foods, support for businesses and NGOs producing iodized salt, and conduct of awareness-raising and information campaigns for the general public on the dangers of the ailments caused by iodine deficiency and on the benefits of iodized salt. Measures to encourage the exclusive breastfeeding of babies during the first six months of life have also been implemented.

135. According to the EDSM, 71 per cent of women stated that they had undergone excision. Almost three quarters of Mauritanian women between the ages of 15 and 49 have suffered excision. The rate varies widely between ethnic groups (92 per cent of Soninke women, 72 per cent of Pulaar women, and 71 per cent of Arab women; but only 28 per cent of Wolof women). However there has been a decline in this practice during the last 15 years. It is less common in urban than in rural areas (45 against 77 per cent)

136. *Gavage* is the practice of forcing young and adolescent girls to consume excessive amounts of food so that they put on weight and become obese. This practice has harmful effects on their health. A large proportion of women are subjected to *gavage*: a little over one in five women between the ages of 15 and 49 have been force-fed in this way. This is an almost exclusively Arab practice. The highest numbers of force-fed women are found in the central areas (30%), in the south (36%), in rural areas (24%), and among women who have not attended school (39%).

137. However, these practices are in retreat as a result of the information and awareness-raising campaigns conducted in the departments concerned to highlight their harmful effects on the health of girls and women.

138. The efforts of the authorities are supported by development partners. Major advances have been made thanks to the assistance of UNICEF and other United Nations institutions and programmes. Tangible results have been achieved, in particular in adapting the policies for children, the Code on the Protection of Children and the national youth policies, as well as through the issuance of the decree on the compulsory iodization of salt.

C. Social security and child-care services and facilities (art. 26 and art. 18, para. 3)

139. Social benefits are provided for the very young through their working parents, but also for children who have reached the legal age for admission to employment. These benefits are fixed by the general statute on civil servants and State employees, the Act establishing the social security system, and the General Collective Labour Agreement. Pursuant to article 38 of Act No. 93.09 of 18 January 1993 on the general statute of civil servants and contractual employees of the State, civil servants are entitled to family allowances and maternity benefits.

140. Civil servants are entitled to an old-age pension and, when necessary, lifelong invalidity pensions under the conditions set out in the retirement schedule if they have completed 35 years of actual service from age 18 or if they have reached the age limit of 60 years (art. 72 of the Act). Private-sector workers are entitled to social security benefits under the conditions set out in the schedule of the National Social Security Fund (Act No. 67.039 of 2 February 1967 establishing the social security system, as amended by Act No. 87.296 of 24 November 1982). This schedule recognizes entitlement to the following benefits:

- Antenatal allowances;
- Childbirth allowance;
- Family allowances;
- Daily maternity benefit;
- Assistance for mothers and infants.

141. The enterprise and inter-enterprise medical services are responsible for examining workers reporting sick and for providing or arranging for the provision of the necessary treatment, for ensuring compliance with the official health regulations in the workplace, and for furnishing expert medical assistance when necessary. Articles 23-25 and 64-65 of the General Collective Labour Agreement set out the conditions for compensating sick or injured workers and the modalities of the provision of the assistance due to hospitalized workers.

142. Day-care services for young children are expanding rapidly, their number having increased from 67 units in 2004 to 126 in 2006 (for the whole country). These services have trained staff and appropriate programmes and equipment. The policy for the development of young children has set the target of increasing children's access to education and day-care facilities from the 2005 level of 7.4 per cent to 30 per cent by 2010.

D. Standard of living (art. 27, paras. 1 and 3)

143. Over recent years important measures affecting the incomes of civil servants and other State employees, extended also to workers in the formal private sector, have been introduced to the great satisfaction of the persons concerned. A uniform increase of 8,000 ouguiyas in the salaries of civil servants and other civil and military employees of the State (an increase of between 20 and 80 per cent in medium and low salaries) and a 20 per cent increase in civil and military retirement pensions were awarded in January 2005. These rises followed on the 28 per cent increase awarded to all these categories in January 2004.

144. At the same as acting to help the public sector and in order to narrow the gap between public- and private-sector workers, the Government introduced arrangements for negotiations between employers and the social partners. These arrangements encouraged a social dialogue between employers and the various trade union associations. It resulted in 2005 in an increase in the guaranteed minimum inter-occupational wage (SMIG), which rose from 4,312 to 21,000 ouguiyas (an increase of 397 per cent).

145. A further increase of 50 per cent in the salaries of civil servants and other State employees was made in December 2005, accompanied by a number of other positive measures (lowering of income taxes and charges, review of the need to increase the various allowances, favourable treatment for members of the lower levels of the civil service) to improve their living conditions and, consequently, those of their children and all other persons maintained by them.

146. The Government has introduced other general measures affecting all strata of society. For example, the Ministry of Commerce, in conjunction with the various sectors concerned, introduced measures to stabilize the prices of essential foodstuffs in order to guarantee an adequate purchasing power which was fair for everyone.

147. It was decided in this same context to exempt medicines from import taxes and customs duties. At the same the authorities endeavoured to identify other problems having a specific impact on children before planning appropriate solutions. Malnutrition is one such problem receiving particular attention.

148. The Government is making efforts to provide people with decent housing. A number of measures are being carried out in the areas of social housing and property ownership and development with a view to meeting the needs in question.

149. The Construction and Property Management Corporation of Mauritania (SOCOGIM), in partnership with the commercial banks, has implemented a programme for the construction of 1,000 housing units in Nouakchott.

150. The Government has introduced a new policy to improve living conditions by means of a cooperative and participatory approach designed to help the poorest people of the outlying districts of the main towns. The "Twize" programme has produced 4,500 housing units, including 1,095 units of social housing.

151. Development projects (roads, schools, health facilities, drinking water, micro-credit, jobs) are being carried out under the Urban Development Programme in the outlying districts of Nouakchott, including the construction of 7,500 units of social housing.

152. The Government is also encouraging the private sector and civil society to get involved in the housing sector. In this connection, in November 2003 a women's group known as ATOIT launched an ambitious programme of social housing (380 units) for women heads of household.

153. Mauritania is a least developed country (LDC) with limited resources. It does not claim to have attained all its objectives. However, some progress has been made in such areas as research into food self-sufficiency, the fight against poverty, and universal access to the core social services.

VII. EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

A. Education, including vocational training and guidance (art. 28)

154. In Mauritania's legal order the right to education is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution in its preamble, on an equal footing with all the other economic and social rights. Furthermore, article 10 of the Constitution enshrines the freedom of intellectual creativity. The principle of the equality of the sexes in the various modes of education (pre-school, primary, secondary, technical and vocational, and higher) is guaranteed by national legislation.

155. Pursuant to article 12 of Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 on reform of the education system, a Department of National Languages was established in the University of Nouakchott.

156. This measure amended the operating system of the old Institute of National Languages established by Decree No. 079-348/PG/MFES of 19 December 1979 with a view to organizing, coordinating and promoting all the applied research in the field of national languages. These tasks have now been transferred to the new Department created for this purpose in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

157. A huge literacy programme was implemented for women and rural dwellers. As a result of the significant progress made, the female literacy rate rose from 30 per cent in 1988 to 45.3 per cent in 2000, but women still lag behind men, whose literacy rate stands at about 60 per cent.

158. These low literacy rates are due in part to women's poor access to education (until fairly recently) and the persistence of poor overall retention rates in primary education, which affects girls more than boys. This situation remains relatively unchanged in rural areas. A survey revealed that in rural areas enjoying good rainfall most family workers are female (58.5%) and that 41.1 per cent of these females have never attended school, as against a figure of 19.7 per cent for males (household and farm survey, 2000-2001).

159. With regard to pre-school education, Mauritania has 428,000 children aged four years and under and 368,000 in the 5-9 age group, according to the Ministry responsible for children.

Table 7. Projection of the distribution of young children, by age group, region and sex, 2006 (base RGPH 2000)

Age groups							
	0-3 years		3-6 years		6-8 years		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
	215 778	212 050	139 597	137 209	85 177	83 759	873 570
	427 828		276 806		168 936		

Table 8. Enrolment capacity and staffing numbers of education facilities for young children

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Capacity</i>	<i>Staff</i>
Public kindergarten	13	1 170	56
Private kindergarten	140	8 400	285
Community day-care	92	11 040	268
Total	214	20 610	609

Source: Children's Department/Ministry responsible for children, 2006.

160. Article 1 of the Decree No. 016-2007/PM on the powers of the Minister for the Advancement of Women, for Children and the Family, who is responsible for organizing this Ministry's central administration, states that one of its tasks is to "promote children's protection and well-being". The Ministry's organigram includes a Children's Department with three services, one of which is responsible for developing a national system of education and day-care for young children.

161. There are currently four types of pre-school facility catering for children between the ages of three and six: community day-care; public kindergarten; *mahadra*; and private kindergarten.

162. The National Policy for the Development of Young Children (PNDPE) adopted in 2005 is intended to contribute to the promotion of a young-child-friendly environment, build grass-roots capacity, ensure the comprehensive development of young children, and encourage grass-roots initiatives taking a global and integrated approach to young children.

163. The Government is pursuing a far-reaching policy to make good the current deficit in this type of education. Pre-school education is recognized as an important component of the ten-year programme (2001-2010) for the development of the education system.

164. The financial resources allocated to the young children's sector have increased steadily in recent years. A medium-term expenditure framework has just been formulated as part of the updating of the Strategic Framework for Poverty Reduction (SFPR) for 2007-2010.

165. In the context of the specific measures adopted to improve basic and secondary education, there have been significant improvements in the past two decades as a result of a number of factors, including the firm political will manifested in ambitious programmes of school building,

curricula revision, improvement of planning and management capacity, and constant upgrading of the qualifications of teachers as a means of boosting the quality and effectiveness of the education dispensed.

166. The following factors may be cited as accelerating the increase in school attendance:

- a) The construction of schools in all urban areas, including areas with low population density, on the principle of bringing the school to the pupil rather than the pupil to the school;
- b) The establishment of a fund to support school attendance by girls. Campaigns conducted on radio and television and through networks of local associations have boosted school attendance by girls and narrowed the gap between girls and boys;
- c) The introduction of the school canteens programme, which supports disadvantaged children and helps to reduce drop-out rates;
- d) The reform adopted by Act No. 99.012 of 26 April 1999, which was designed to correct the dysfunctional situations revealed by the 1995 reform, encourage the matching of training to the needs of the market, improve performance, rationalize the management system, and establish education as one of the country's cultural realities while still preserving an essential openness to its other realities.

167. All these measures derive from the ten-year programme for the development of the education system (National Programme for Development of the Education Sector 2001-2010 (PNDSE)), which has the following principal components:

- a) Consolidation of the system's management on the basis of development of planning capacity, re-organization of the central administration, continuous assessment of the system, and programming of recruitment;
- b) Increased availability of education opportunities, which will entail amongst other things the production of an inventory of schools and the re-organization of university education and technical and vocational training;
- c) Improvement of the quality of teaching, which will depend largely on the revision of curricula, provision of teaching tools, upgrading of professional qualifications, restructuring of initial and in-service training, and general improvement of administrative and teaching staff;
- d) Improved management of human resources as a result of the introduction of a careers structure based on merit and performance and the rationalization of postings;
- e) The reduction of regional disparities backed by a voluntarist policy for resource allocation;
- f) The improvement of girls' attendance rates (this will remain an important component of governmental policy);
- g) An increased role for the private sector in the provision of education, to be achieved by means of a appropriate policy of incentives.

168. The Adoption of the Act of 13 June 2001 on compulsory basic education resulted in increased enrolment in fundamental education. The figure reached 394,000 in 2002-2003

(200,000 boys and 194,000 girls). The girl-boy ratio also improved, from 71 per cent in the early 1990s to 97 per cent in 2002-2003.

Table 9. Gross attendance rates in basic education (percentages)

	<i>1989-90</i>	<i>1998-99</i>	<i>2001-02</i>	<i>2002-03</i>	<i>2003-04</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>
Boys	51.2	87.6	88.5	90.7	97.9	98.0	94.7
Girls	39.3	83.5	88.9	92.7	94.1	92.3	92.4
TOTAL	45.5	85.5	88.7	91.7	96.0	95.1	94.7

Source: MEN, ASS.

169. The gross attendance rate in basic education rose from 91.7 per cent in 2002-2003 to 94.7 per cent in 2005-2006. This rate and the proportion of girls increased between the 2001-2002 school year and the following year, from 88.9 to 92.7 and 48.77 to 49.17 per cent respectively, with the result that the report *The State of the World's Children 2004* cited Mauritania among the countries whose performance had improved significantly in terms of girls' enrolment. Table 10 shows a clear and steady increase in school attendance.

Table 10. Basic education (public and private)

<i>School year</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Total pupils</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Percentage girls</i>
2000-2001	2 980	360 677	173 758	48.18
2001-2002	3 266	375 695	183 220	48.77
2002-2003	3 347	394 400	193 944	49.17

Source: MEN, Department of School Statistics.

170. Despite this improved performance, the education system still has serious distortions which cause big regional disparities and very high pupil-teacher ratios.

Table 11. Enrolment and attendance rates by region, 2001-2002 (percentages)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Enrolment rate</i>		<i>Attendance rate</i>	
	<i>Gross</i>	<i>Net</i>	<i>Gross</i>	<i>Net</i>
Hodh Chargui	114.6	53.6	84.3	77.2
Hodh Gharbi	110.7	49.9	86.2	56.5
Assaba	112.6	59.4	93.8	76.5
Gorgol	108.5	39.0	75.6	55.8
Brakna	111.8	21.0	90.2	59.7
Trarza	123.7	34.1	90.7	61.2
Adrar	112.5	39.5	115.9	61.3

<i>Region</i>	<i>Enrolment rate</i>		<i>Attendance rate</i>	
Dakhlet Nouadhibou	131.1	27.1	135.2	47.0
Tagant	131.2	41.8	111.4	70.7
Guidimakha	105.5	39.8	75.0	61.3
Tiris Zemour	106.7	40.6	119.7	63.7
Inchiri	115.8	18.3	112.4	36.9
Nouakchott	92.8	19.5	100.2	45.5
National average	110.3	40.2	91.05	59.5

Source: Study on the PNDPE project, 2004.

171. The gross attendance rate shows big regional disparities: it is very high in the north but lower in the south-east and south-west of the country. There are also regional gaps in the graduation rate. While the repeated-year rate in basic education varies between 13 and 15 per cent and deteriorated to 15.9 per cent in 2002 for the whole country, it is 7.6 per cent for Hodh Chargui and close to 25 per cent in the northern regions. The target value for 2005 was nine per cent.

Table 12. Pupil-teacher and pupil-class ratios

<i>Region</i>	<i>Ratios</i>	
	<i>Pupil-teacher</i>	<i>Pupil-class</i>
Hodh Chargui	43	43
Hodh Gharbi	42	34.7
Assaba	52	45.6
Gorgol	56	43.7
Brakna	45	37.6
Trarza	35	33.3
Adrar	32	28
Dakhlet Nouadhibou	40	62.7
Tagant	36	34.4
Guidimakha	45	37.4
Tiris Zemour	36	43.2
Inchiri	19	22.6
Nouakchott	37	49.4
National average	41	39.7

Source: Study on the PNDPE project, 2004.

172. Table 12 shows a generally high pupil-teacher ratio, especially in certain regions (Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna, Dakhlet Nouadhibou, and Guidimakha). However, the situation has clearly improved, for the average was 50 to 45 in 2000-2001 but fell to 39 in 2001-2002. The target value for 2005 was 44 pupils per teacher.

173. Despite the considerable improvement in the gross rate of school attendance in basic education, there were still 128,000 children (67,000 boys and 61,000 girls) not attending school in 2003, although some of them were attending Koranic schools (*mahadras*). In order to correct this situation the Government is seeking to increase the number of schools catering for all age groups and strengthen the multi-grade system.

174. The ongoing annual recruitment of teachers, the use of the multi-grade system in rural areas, the double-vacation system and double shifts in urban areas, the grouping of rural schools, and the many other measures affecting the quality of education, the retention capacity, and the matching of training to the jobs market have failed to solve all the problems confronting the education system. The net attendance rate remains far below expectations, scarcely above 65.8 per cent in 2002 (67.2% for boys and 64.4% for girls). Furthermore, the capacity of the education system to look after, educate and train children remains disturbingly low.

175. The number of secondary teachers rose from over 7,000 in 1991-1992 to 19,232 in 2002-2003, when the transition rate to the first year of secondary was 64 per cent, an 11-point increase over the previous year and in excess of the target value of 50 per cent for 2005.

Table 13. Public and private secondary education (general, technical and teacher-training)

<i>School year</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Total pupils</i>	<i>Total girls</i>	<i>Percentage girls</i>
2000-01	142	77 205	33 078	42.84
2001-02	154	79 669	34 396	43.17
2002-03	170	84 407	37 496	44.42

Source: MEN, Planning Department.

176. The repeated-year rate in basic education fell from 14.9 per cent in 2001 to 10.2 per cent in 2006. In the first cycle of secondary this rate fell from 15.9 to 12.9 per cent over the same period.

177. However, the rate of transition from primary to secondary is only 38.8 per cent for girls and 43.3 per cent for boys. This problem is compounded by the very high wastage rate among girls between basic and higher education: only 73 of every thousand girls continue their studies up to university degree level.

178. The baccalaureate pass rate for the school year 2004-2005 was 18 per cent, and the BEPC pass rate was in that same year was 27 per cent for boys and 18 per cent for girls; the transition rate to the first year of secondary was 62.6 per cent for boys and 60.7 per cent for girls.

179. An analysis of the main objectives of the National Programme for the Development of the Education Sector (PNDSE) shows that the Government is acutely aware of these various challenges, which it intends to tackle by improving access to education and the quality of the teaching, reorganizing the academic cycle, and improving the fairness and efficiency of the education system.

180. Table 14 indicates the Government's determination to improve performances and raise education standards in order to turn education into an authentic instrument of development matched to the needs of a modern society capable of facing up to the great challenges of the times.

Table 14. Priority objectives and performance indicators

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Reference base</i>		<i>Quantified objectives</i>		
	<i>Date</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2015</i>
Gross primary enrolment	2000	88%	90%	98%	100%
Gross girl's attendance rate	2000	85%	92%	98%	100%
Pupils completing primary cycle	1999	55%	56%	76%	100%
Proportion of girls in sixth year of basic	1999	51%	58%	73%	100%
New pupils entering first year of secondary	1999	14 814	17 991	27 816	46 514
Pupil-teacher ration, first year of secondary	1999	36	26	27	27

Source: SFPR performance report, June 2003.

181. It is a constant that one of the essential aims in this area is to increase school attendance by girls; this endeavour is already supported by several measures, including a programme on girls' attendance, one of the purposes of which is to identify the obstacles and find solutions in order to reduce a drop-out rate which is higher among girls than boys through a grass-roots approach designed to alter behaviour by boosting awareness of the importance of keeping girls at school. This is the approach taken under the project "Clean, healthy and green community schools", undertaken with UNICEF support. These efforts have resulted in a steady rise in the proportion of girls in the first cycle of secondary education (currently 45%).

182. The promotion of girls' schooling has also been backed by measures on improvement of the awareness and training of teachers, support for poor families (income-generating activities), production of a handbook on girls' counselling, and award of prizes to the winners of competitions for admission to the sixth grade and the science baccalaureate. Another component is designed to improve the quality of education and boost performances. This consists of a system of distance allowances established in 2002 in the most remote regions with very high rates of absenteeism.

183. New curricula have been designed for the teacher-training schools, a further training programme was introduced in 2002, teacher-training institutes have opened their doors in the chief towns of the regions, and the production of handbooks has been stepped up. In addition, the current PNDSE makes provision for the adaptation of curricula to the needs of working life and, in particular, for improvement of the teaching of civic affairs, with a view to incorporating in this subject education in human rights, republican values, citizenship and democracy.

184. The budgetary appropriations for education are steadily increasing, amounting to 16.2 per cent of the State budget in 2002, already in excess of the target of 14.9 per cent set for 2005. In 2003 education spending amounted to 5.8 per cent of GDP. This offers ample confirmation of the priority which the Government accords to the education sector.

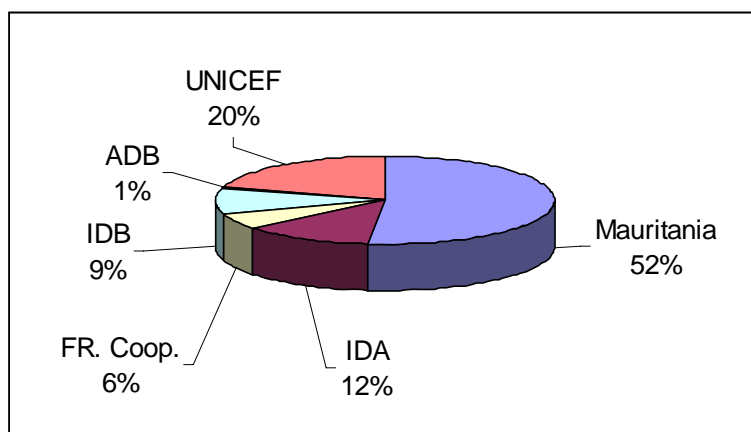
Table 15. Revised outline of medium-term education spending (millions of ouguiyas)

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Total spending	10 072	11 191	14 800	17 114	19 359
- Operating costs	8 320	8 692	9 666	9 995	10 429
- Investment	7 752	2 499	5 134	7 199	8 929
Administration	330	328	352	495	437
Basic education	3 867	3 951	4 354	4 605	5 293
Secondary	2 315	2 338	2 738	2 892	2 847
Technical and vocational	324	337	420	350	356
Teacher-training	264	266	294	317	317
Higher	1 291	1 471	1 507	1 337	1 179
Spending as % of GDP	4.4	4.5	5.5	5.8	5.9

Source: SFPR performance report, June 2003.

185. It must be pointed out that the budget appropriation for basic education is being increased to expand the access at this level. It accounted for 51 per cent of the education budget in 2004 as against 46.5 per cent in 2000. The appropriation for investment in education was 46 per cent in 2004 as against only 17 per cent in 2000.

186. Education is funded by the State and partly by development partners (International Development Association (IDA), Islamic Development Bank (IDB), African Development Bank (ADB), French cooperation, and UNICEF), as shown in the chart below.



187. The policies for technical and vocational training are focused on building capacity by expanding the physical facilities, incorporating new occupations and securing vocational diversification. The main focuses were redefined in 2000 under the PNDSE. Since 2001 a national public-employment information system has been publishing figures on the numbers of persons obtaining qualifications. The figure was 3,620 in 2002, with 5,862 students undergoing training (see table 16).

188. This vocational training covers a wide range of occupations, for it has to meet the needs of a swiftly developing economy. Vocational training centres have been opened in all the chief towns of the regions in order to provide the local manpower needed to cope with the economic and social changes which the country is undergoing.

189. Awareness-raising campaigns have been carried out at all levels with a view to upgrading training for qualifications and integrating young people more fully in the development process, the future of which depends on the number of Mauritians obtaining qualifications in small trades (electrical work, vehicle repair, industrial refrigeration, bricklaying, carpentry, etc.).

Table 16. Students in technical and vocational training, by occupation, 2001-2002

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Graduation, 2001</i>	<i>Enrolment, 2002</i>
Accountancy/management	194	768
Secretarial/office	54	442
Information technology	1 092	846
Electronics	12	36
Electrical work	273	492
Vehicle repair	271	866
Welding	137	285
Building and public works	254	503
Clothing	8	95
Fisheries	68	104
Others	1 238	1 405
Total	3 620	5 862

Source: SIME (Employment Department).

190. The qualitative improvements are making it easier to meet the requirements of the labour market and avoid a labour shortage in one sector and over-supply and the resulting unemployment in another. The National Institute of Technical and Vocational Training, established in 2002, is responsible for promoting this kind of training.

191. All these measures should produce a doubling of the numbers of workers with technical and vocational qualifications and improvement of the quality of the existing training, as well as creating additional capacity for job-release training and apprenticeships to match supply to demand in the labour market. With this aim in mind, the measures provided for in the PNDSE for 2001-2005 and in the Political Declaration on Youth adopted in 2004 have been given effect through the establishment of the National Institute and the opening of several regional training centres.

192. Efforts have been made under the PNDSE to:

- Improve the quality of the existing training by introducing job-release and on-the-job training. This applies in the case of technical and vocational training to 20 to 25 per cent of staff every year;
- Improve the quality and relevance of technical and vocational training by establishing the National Institute, which will ensure that the system works properly by analysing and processing data on the labour market's need for skilled workers, by introducing quality-control procedures and monitoring and evaluation of the training activities.

193. The Declaration on Youth Policy provides for several agencies and policies to improve employment opportunities and job placement and to combat unemployment:

- A database to list job opportunities and direct young people towards jobs in the light of their qualifications and the needs of employers;
- Grouping of economic activities suitable for young people, in particular in the sectors where most jobs are created;
- A framework for negotiation among national business operators and the bodies responsible for technical and vocational training and making young people more aware of the social value of manual work: the belittlement of manual work is one of the main reasons for the high rate of youth unemployment;
- Instruction in informal-sector occupations and jobs: catering, plumbing, vehicle repair, etc.;
- Combating poverty and promoting income-generating activities.

194. The Government is thus endeavouring to find responses to the demands of young people who have been unable to complete their general education by offering them alternative means to continue their studies, find jobs and avoid marginalization and a precarious existence.

195. The rehabilitation centres for the social reintegration of children from poor backgrounds, which used to be run by the Ministry responsible for social matters, have now been transferred to the Ministry responsible for children. A public institution for the protection and social integration of children in difficult situations has been established in the light of the experience of these centres (see para. 86 above).

196. Activities for young adults and adolescents, whether or not attending school, have been launched under the fifth annual programme of cooperation between Mauritania and UNFPA in order to increase their awareness of the fight against HIV/AIDS. These activities are run by education clubs and helplines and by counselling units in youth centres; support is provided for the establishment of networks of youth associations, the production of teaching tools, and the involvement of religious leaders.

197. With regard to corporal punishment and violence in general, article 13 of the Constitution states that "all forms of mental and physical violence are prohibited". This provision applies above all to children, in view of their mental and physical vulnerability.

198. Other current legislation (in particular the Criminal Code) provide for punishment of all forms of violence, irrespective of the victim. Specific provisions on children have just been introduced by the Act on the juridical protection of children.

199. Mauritania's ratification in 2002 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography reinforces the protection of children and extends it to other forms of violence.

200. The Government has also introduced measures for the prosecution and punishment of child abuse (training and appointment of special judges, reinforcement of the vice squad, and awareness-raising for doctors). The Ministry of National Education has prohibited corporal punishment in schools and ensures that this prohibition is strictly enforced: it was given widespread publicity, including the display of posters in schools.

201. Article 12 of Decision No. 701 MEN/PR of 4 November 1968 on the operating rules of primary schools states: "The following are the only punishments which teachers may use:

- Bad-conduct marks;
- Reprimands;
- Detention during part of play-time and after school, under the teacher's personal supervision;
- Temporary exclusion imposed by the head teacher after consulting the teaching staff".

Article 17 of this Decision adds: "All forms of corporal punishment are absolutely prohibited".

202. In addition, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, for Children and the Family, in partnership with NGOs, institutes legal proceedings whenever it is informed of a case of corporal punishment or ill-treatment of a child. It has also organized numerous events (seminars, radio and television round tables, etc.) to boost awareness of the importance of respect for children's dignity, in accordance with *sharia* law and in the spirit of tolerance characteristic of Mauritanian society. The Ministry is planning to make a detailed study of this phenomenon and its various manifestations.

B. Aims of education (art. 29)

203. The aims of education are described essentially in Act No. 099-012 of 26 April 1999 on reform of the education system. This Act was the formal culmination of all the policies which the authorities had been pursuing over the years to deliver education opening the way to high achievement for present and future generations. It sets out a balance sheet of the known shortcomings and dysfunctions while also taking account of the mandatory technical and scientific requirements deriving from the international context.

204. The Act brings all levels of education under the same roof, thereby offering all pupils the same opportunities and reinforcing the role of the schools as the crucible of national unity and cohesion. It also introduces instruction in civic affairs at all levels – an important step forward in familiarising children with public institutions and the cardinal values of Mauritanian society.

205. The National Plan of Action for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights stresses inter alia the need to introduce human rights education in schools. This move, once it has been effectively accomplished, will constitute a decisive stage in citizens' realization of their rights, duties and freedoms.

C. Leisure, recreation and cultural activities (art. 31)

206. The authorities are carrying out programmes to provide more sports facilities and equipment in schools and elsewhere, with a view to encouraging young people, particularly girls, to take up the sports of their choice. Campaigns have been carried out on radio and television and in the other media to make people more aware of the need to take up sports and of the importance of cultural leisure activities.

207. The Ministry for Youth and Sport formulated and had adopted by the Council of Ministers in March-April 2004 two national strategies, one for youth and the other for sport. These strategies were published in fascicle form in Arabic and French.

208. The concern of the State to give greater attention to youth problems led to the establishment in 2007 of the country's first-ever ministry responsible specifically for youth and sport. The National Youth Policy (PNJ) was presented to the Government and adopted during the first quarter of 2007. It addresses the needs and aspirations of young people and proposes measures to improve their situation, including:

- Training;
- Jobs;
- Assistance with job placement;
- Cultural development;
- Healthy leisure activities.

209. The PNJ encourages local authorities and the private sector to invest in the construction of amenity parks and municipal stadiums in urban communes. New facilities will be created. A very broad range of activities has been introduced for young people (national weeks, tournaments, competitions).

210. In order to encourage discussions between associations and between associations and the authorities and development partners, arrangements were put in place for young people to debate the issues of the day, and sessions 1, 2 and 3 of the Youth Parliament were held in Nouadhibou in 1998, in Kiffa in 1999 and in Rosso in 2000.

211. Participation by young people at all levels has been encouraged by the creation of the National Council for Youth and Sport. There will also be regional councils made up of representatives of regional youth associations and movements. At the departmental level there will be departmental councils of representatives of district associations.

212. The National Network of Youth Associations (RENAJ) was officially created and set up in 2006. The national associations listed below make their contributions to the development of group activities:

- The Scouts and Guides Association of Mauritania (an extremely dynamic body with branches in all the regions);
- The Mauritanian Association for the Promotion of Amateur Theatre;
- The National Commission on School Holiday Camps;

- The Youth Hostels Association of Mauritania;
- The Olympic and Sports Committee of Mauritania;
- The national sports federations.

213. Despite the action taken to encourage participation, very few people practice sports in Mauritania:

- Only three or four of the existing 37 sports federations (football, basket-ball, athletics, and karate) are operational and carrying out programmes which have a real impact on the development of sporting activities. The dearth of financial resources limits the federations' scope and often forces them into deficit.;
- The sports associations active in the development of sports at the top level, most of which are funded by public enterprises, are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain the necessary operational resources from these enterprises.

214. The country's network of youth and sports facilities consists of some 37 youth centres, 24 of them run by the Ministry for Youth and Sport and 13 by communes.

Table 17. Youth and sports centres (YSCs)

<i>Regional office</i>	<i>Youth and sports centres</i>	
	<i>Name</i>	<i>Facilities</i>
1. Nouakchott	1. New Youth Centre, 1979 (Kingdom of Morocco)	Offices, 400-seat auditorium, multi-purpose hall, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	2. Teyarett YSC, 1997 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	3. Dar Naïm YSC, 1998 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	4. El Mina YSC, 1998 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	5. Sebkha YSC, 1998 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, 100-seat auditorium, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	6. Arafat YSC, 1999 (French cooperation/CIDA)	Multi-purpose hall, library, 100-seat auditorium, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	7. Riad YSC, 1999 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	8. Tevragh Zeina YSC, 1998 (CIDA)	Multi-purpose hall, library, 100-seat auditorium
	9. Youth Instructors' Training Centre, 1979 (Chinese cooperation)	600-seat auditorium, multi-purpose hall, accommodation block, restaurant, library, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts, administration offices

<i>Regional office</i>	<i>Youth and sports centres</i>	
	<i>Name</i>	<i>Facilities</i>
	10. Olympic Complex Office, 1983 (Chinese cooperation)	10,000-seat stadium, running track, football fields, volley-ball and basket-ball courts, administration offices, restaurant, 100-bed hotel
	11. Capital Stadium, 1962 (France/IDA/commune)	400 seats, flood-lit football field
	12. Ksar Stadium, 1976 (North Korea/IDA/commune)	200 seats, football field
	13. Toujounine Stadium, 2001 (IDA/commune)	500 seats, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	14. Headquarters of Scouts of Mauritania, 1998 (UNICEF)	Administration offices, meeting room
2. Hodh El Chargui	15. Nema YSC, 1999 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
3. Hodh El Gharbi	16. Aïoun Youth Centre, 1976 (local people)	100-seat auditorium, multi-purpose hall, basket-ball court
	17. Aïoun Stadium, 2000 (IDA/commune)	Football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
4. Assaba	18. Kiffa YSC, 1999 (French cooperation/State)	Football fields, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts, youth centre under construction, 200-seat hall, multi-purpose hall, library, administration offices
5. Gorgol	19. Kaédi Youth Centre, 1950 (French cooperation), rebuilt 1998	100-seat auditorium, library, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	20. Lexeïba Youth Centre, 1984 (commune)	Library, multi-purpose hall
6. Brakna	21. Aleg Youth Centre, 2000, (Saudi Fund)	300-seat hall, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	22. Aleg Stadium, 2000 (IDA/commune)	Football field, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	23. Boghé Youth Centre, 1950	Library, multi-purpose hall
	24. Boghé Stadium, 2000 (Regional Fund/ French cooperation)	Football field, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts (under construction)
7. Trarza	25. Rosso Youth Centre	Library, multi-purpose hall, 200-seat auditorium
	26. Rosso Stadium, 1976 (North Korea), rebuilt by AMEXTIPE 1999	Football field, basket-ball court, running track
8. Adrar	27. Atar Youth Centre, 1979 (Saudi Fund)	300-seat hall, library, administration offices
	28. Atar Stadium, 1998 (IDA/commune)	Football field, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts, running track
	29. Chinguitti Youth Centre, 1967	Library, multi-purpose hall

<i>Regional office</i>	<i>Youth and sports centres</i>	
	<i>Name</i>	<i>Facilities</i>
9. Nouadhibou	30. Nouadhibou Youth Centre, 1974 (North Korea, rebuilt 1998; French cooperation, closed 1998; UNICEF/Plaine Jeunesse)	300-seat auditorium, library, multi-purpose hall, administration offices
	31. Nouadhibou Municipal Stadium, 1974 (North Korea)	Football field, basket-ball court
	32. New Nouadhibou Youth Centre, 1999 (IDA, commune)	200-seat auditorium, library, multi-purpose hall, administration offices, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts, young peoples' workshop
10. Inchiri	33. Akjoujt YSC, 1999 (French cooperation/IDA/commune)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football field, basket-ball and volley-ball courts
11. Tagant	34. Tidlikja YSC, 2001 (AMEXTIPE project)	Invitation to tender, 2000
12. Tiris Zemour	35. Zouerate YSC, 1999 (French cooperation)	Multi-purpose hall, library, football field, basket-ball, volley-ball and handball courts
	36. Zouerate Youth Centre, 2001	Multi-purpose hall, library, 200-seat auditorium
13. Guidimakha	37. Sélibaby Youth Centre, 1979 (Saudi Fund; rebuilding and extension by State)	300-seat auditorium, library, administrative offices, football fields, basket-ball and volley-ball courts

Source: Ministry for Youth and Sport, 2007.

VIII. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

A. Children in situations of emergency

1. Refugee children (art. 22)

215. Being a party to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951 and its Additional Protocol of 1967, as well as to the OAU Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 10 September 1969, Mauritania adopted Decree No. 2005-022 of 3 March 2005 on application of those instruments. This decree establishes the modalities for applying these instruments and the procedures which persons seeking asylum in Mauritanian territory must follow.

216. Article 3 of the Decree specifies the authority to which asylum-seekers must apply (the Ministry of the Interior) and the documents which must accompany applications. Article 4 specifies the national agency responsible for ruling on individual applications: the National Advisory Commission on Refugees. This Commission is also authorized to give advisory opinions on “any matter relating to refugees submitted to it for consideration”. Its President and members are “appointed by decision of the Minister for the Interior, on the proposal of the ministerial departments concerned” (art. 5).

217. Articles 9-13 set out all the rights accorded to refugees admitted to Mauritanian territory, in accordance with Mauritania's international undertakings.

2. Children in armed conflicts (art. 38), including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

218. Since Mauritania is not involved in any armed conflicts, it does not have a direct interest in matters relating to children affected by armed conflicts, except when it admits to its territory refugee children fleeing such situations. However, in order to provide protection for children in general terms, the Government has fixed the minimum age for admission to employment at 14 years.

219. Mauritania is a party to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 regulating the relevant aspects of international humanitarian law. Under Mauritania's prevailing constitutional system these conventions form an integral part of the body of national legislation and may accordingly be invoked before the public authorities and before the courts.

220. Where anti-personnel mines are concerned, it is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of mines and other unexploded ordnance in Mauritanian territory, a legacy of the Sahara conflict. The two regions most seriously affected are Dakhlet Nouadhibou and Tiris Zemour in the north of the country. These two regions alone have an area of 310,000 square kilometres and 294,000 persons at risk. According to *Landmine Monitor Report*, 346 persons were killed and 239 were injured, 580 animals were killed, and 33 vehicles destroyed in the period 1978-2005.

221. Pursuant to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transport of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, Mauritania adopted a plan of action to locate and destroy all the mines in the national territory by 2011. The programme is being carried out by the National Office for Humanitarian Mine-Clearance (BNDH) and it has the support of UNDP, UNICEF and international NGOs. The BNDH is implementing in collaboration with UNICEF an education component concerning the hazard represented by the mines with the aim of delivering a message about safe behaviour to the affected communities and continuing the training of NGO outreach workers and involving them in the education activities. There is a second component on assistance to victims of mine explosions, in which the aim is to obtain reliable data on such victims and identify their needs in terms of social reintegration and to build up the capacity of the National Orthopaedic Centre (branches in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou). These two components are concerned in particular with the protection of women and children in these regions.

Table 18. ILO Conventions ratified by Mauritania

<i>N°</i>	<i>Convention</i>	<i>Ratification date</i>
1	Weekly Rest (Industry) Convention (No. 14, 1921)	20 June 1921
2	Minimum Age (Sea) Convention (Revised) (No. 58, 1936)	8 November 1936
3	Night Work (Women) Convention (No. 4, 1919)	20 June 1961
4	Minimum Age (Industry) Convention (No. 5, 1919)	20 June 1961
5	Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention (No. 6, 1919)	20 June 1961
6	Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention (No. 11, 1921)	20 June 1961
7	White Lead (Painting) Convention (No. 13, 1921)	20 June 1961
8	Workmen's Compensation (Accidents) Convention (No. 17, 1925)	20 June 1961
9	Minimum Wage-Fixing Machinery Convention (No. 26, 1928)	20 June 1961

<i>N°</i>	<i>Convention</i>	<i>Ratification date</i>
10	Forced Labour Convention (No. 29, 1930)	20 June 1961
11	Minimum Age (Non-Industrial Employment) Convention (No. 33, 1932)	20 June 1961
12	Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised) (No. 41, 1934)	20 June 1961
13	Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention (No. 87, 1948)	20 June 1961
14	Protection of Wages Convention (No. 95, 1949)	20 June 1961
15	Maternity Protection Convention (No. 3, 1919)	8 November 1963
16	Minimum Age (Trimmers and Stokers) Convention (No. 15, 1921)	8 November 1963
17	Workmen's Compensation (Occupational Diseases) Convention (No. 18, 1925)	8 November 1963
18	Equality of Treatment (Accident Compensation) Convention (No. 19, 1925)	8 November 1963
19	Seamen's Articles of Agreement Convention (No. 22, 1926)	8 November 1963
20	Repatriation of Seamen Convention (No. 23, 1926)	8 November 1963
21	Holidays with Pay Convention (No. 52, 1936)	8 November 1963
22	Officers' Competency Certificate Convention (No. 53, 1936)	8 November 1963
23	Safety Provisions (Building) Convention (No. 62, 1937)	8 November 1963
24	Labour Inspection Convention (No. 81, 1947)	8 November 1963
25	Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised) (No. 89, 1948)	8 November 1963
26	Night Work of Young Persons (Industry) Convention (Revised) (No. 90, 1948)	8 November 1963
27	Paid Vacations (Seafarers) Convention (Revised) (No. 91, 1949)	8 November 1963
28	Labour Clauses (Public Contracts) Convention (No. 94, 1949)	8 November 1963
29	Holidays with Pay (Agriculture) Convention (No. 101, 1952)	8 November 1963
30	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111, 1958)	8 November 1963
31	Minimum Age (Fishermen) Convention (No. 112, 1959)	8 November 1963
32	Fishermen's Articles of Agreement Convention (No. 114, 1959)	8 November 1963
33	Final Articles Revision Convention (No. 116, 1961)	8 November 1963
34	Fee-Charging Employment Agencies Convention (Revised) (No. 96, 1949)	31 March 1964
35	Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102, 1952)	15 July 1968
36	Equality of Treatment (Social Security) Convention (No. 118, 1962)	15 July 1968
37	Employment Policy Convention (No. 122, 1964)	30 July 1971
38	Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105, 1957)	3 April 1997
39	Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98, 1949)	3 December 2001
40	Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100, 1951)	3 December 2001
41	Minimum Age Convention (No. 138, 1973)	3 December 2001
42	Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182, 1999)	3 December 2001

B. Children in conflict with the law

1. The administration of juvenile justice (art. 40)

222. Mauritania has made significant progress in the area of juvenile justice, leading to reforms which have facilitated:

- Dissemination of the Code on the Judicial Protection of Minors;
- Strengthening of the collaboration among the various actors involved in juvenile justice;
- Creation of a children's unit in the police force;
- Introduction of alternatives to the detention of minors;
- Social reintegration of children on release from re-education centres;
- Social and legal assistance for children in conflict with the law;
- Training of personnel (judges, members of the children's unit, social workers, staff of re-education centres).

223. Order No. 2005-015 of 5 December 2005 on the Code on the Judicial Protection of Minors harmonizes the national legislation with the Convention. In this connection, a plan for training judges and all the other relevant actors is being carried out.

224. The Code guarantees children the presumption of innocence, the right to information, a time-bound initial period of detention (24 hours renewable once), and the right to examination proceedings: statement of all the offences committed; assistance when giving testimony (attendance of social worker, counsel and guardian), access to all available remedies, assistance of an interpreter, and respect for privacy.

225. This new legal text also ranks the penalties which may be imposed on minors. It distinguishes between three age groups:

- a) Seven years and under: children may not be prosecuted;
- b) Seven to 15 years: children in conflict with the law may be sentenced only to measures of protection;
- c) Fifteen to 18 years: children in conflict with the law may be convicted of criminal offences, but the penalties imposed may not exceed one half of the adult sentences.

226. The Code also offers alternatives to detention, including mediation (by the police, the procurator and the president of the court), ad hoc placement in a family, placement in an institution run by a children's human rights NGO, and placement in a closed, semi-open or open facility.

2. Children deprived of their liberty, including any form of detention, imprisonment or placement in custodial settings (art. 37, paras. (b) and (c) and (d))

227. The Code on the Judicial Protection of Children is based on the principle of not depriving children of their liberty but imposing on them instead educational measures determined in the

light of the decision of the court. The Code excludes the death penalty and forced labour and emphasizes community service.

228. The new legislation provides for monitoring of the children concerned by the Department for the Judicial Protection of Children, NGOs, social assistance bodies, their lawyers, the enforcement judge, and the judge who ordered the measure.

229. A child's situation is reviewed periodically by a monitoring and evaluation commission. The re-education centres also have multi-sectoral commissions for monitoring and supervising children in conflict with the law. And appropriate remedies are available for contesting the imposition of a sentence of deprivation of liberty on a minor.

230. The Code also provides that decisions concerning minors must be handed down promptly and that all forms of summary justice are prohibited.

231. There are several NGOs working with children in the field which provide them with assistance in legal proceedings.

3. The sentencing of juveniles, in particular the prohibition of capital punishment and life imprisonment (art. 37 (a))

232. The Code prohibits capital punishment and sentences of forced labour.

4. Physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39)

233. The Government is going to establish a semi-open re-education centre in Nouakchott and a further two in Rosso and Nouadhibou. It is also endeavouring to improve the work of the Beyla Centre for children's re-education in order to facilitate the children's social reintegration. Several social workers have been entrusted with responsibility for working with such children to this end.

234. The Government has already established in the country's 13 regions special courts to conduct the examination proceedings in criminal cases which may involve minors. Special training and further training are provided for the judges, police officers and social workers concerned.

235. A 2005 study on the situation of children in conflict with the law placed in the Beyla Centre between 1993 and 2005 revealed that a total of 1,123 children were so placed in that period, an average 86 a year, with an increase between 2000 and 2002 (121 children).

236. The following are the commonest reasons for arrest: theft (62%), rape (8%), striking and wounding (7%), immoral conduct, including prostitution (3%), drug use (2%), murder (2%) and personation (very rare). Unspecified offences account for 16 per cent of the total.

237. Most of the children arrested are in the 16-18 age group and they may in principle be deprived of their liberty. These children account for 30 per cent of all persons arrested. This situation illustrates very well the difficulty which the judicial authorities have in establishing children's approximate age. Many children re-offend. An average of 49 per cent of children re-offend once, 10 per cent twice, six per cent three times, and one per cent four times, but no children re-offend five times. The question of re-offending is not mentioned in 34 per cent of the cases.

238. The adoption of the Code on the Judicial Protection of Children constituted a step forward in the process of establishing a juvenile justice system. Furthermore, the shelter for children released from the Beyla Centre, which is run by the NGO Terre des Hommes, the family-style shelter for street children run by the Commissariat for Social Protection in collaboration with the NGO Caritas Mauritania, and the Sebkhah helpline opened by the Ministry of Health are facilities which should be introduced in all regions of the country.

239. The Code provides for measures other than detention (suspended sentence, suspended sentence with a probation or community service order, stay of judgement with or without probation). It also stipulates that the treatment of children in detention must be designed to secure their reform and rehabilitation.

240. With regard to violence against children, Mauritania is involved in the regional activities under the United Nations Study on Violence against Children. Mauritania has itself produced a study on violence against children in Nouakchott as a contribution to the United Nations report and it sent a large delegation to the regional meeting on this subject in Bamako in 2005. The recommendations of that meeting have been taken up by all the ministerial departments and NGOs with responsibilities and commitments in this area.

C. Children in situations of exploitation, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration

1. Economic exploitation, including child labour (art. 32)

241. For the purposes of protecting children against exploitation Mauritania ratified in 2002 ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. Act No. 2001-054 of 19 July 2001 on compulsory basic education imposes on parents and guardians responsibility for ensuring that the children in their custody attend school up to age 14. This may be regarded as an adequate measure for preventing attempts at the abusive economic exploitation of children. Fourteen years is also the age from which the labour legislation authorizes children to work.

242. Table 19 shows the enormous gaps between the regions where child labour is concerned.

Table 19. Regional disparities in child labour

<i>Child workers as a proportion of economically active population</i>	<i>Geographical area</i>	<i>Region</i>
2% to 4%	Urban	Dakhlet Nouadhibou Tiris Zemour Nouakchott
5% to 9.5%	Other rural	Inchiri Trarza Adrar Brakna
12% to 13%	Rural east	Tagant Hodh Chargui Hodh Gharbi Assaba
13.5% to 19%	Rural river	Gorgol Guidimakha

Source: Study on child labour in Mauritania, April 2004.

243. An analysis of the statistics, in particular the content of the ONS paper “Profile of poverty in Mauritania in 2000”, reveals a perfect correlation between the poverty level and the level of child labour. The four poorest regions have the highest rates of child labour between the ages of five and 14 (Guidimakha, Gorgol, Assaba, Hodh Gharbi), while the rates are lower in the richest regions (Nouadhibou – 4.2%; Tiris Zemour – 16.4%; Nouakchott – 25.1%). In a word, the causes of child labour are poverty, the preponderance of agro-pastoral work, and the poor standards of education (see table 20).

Table 20. Poverty levels and child labour

<i>Region</i>	<i>Percentage child employment</i>	<i>Number of illiterates</i>	<i>Primary</i>		<i>Secondary, first cycle</i>		<i>Population aged 6 years and older</i>
			<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	
Guidimakha	21.8	89 972	10 127	7 907	1 507	709	123 867
Gorgol	23.8	101 448	14 529	12 944	2 075	1 279	151 126
Assaba	17.2	105 844	15 632	15 933	2 569	1 713	184 602
Nouadhibou	3.5	12 967	12 424	10 424	4 752	2 595	64 460
T. Zemour	5.9	6 843	6 860	4 405	2 613	1 562	33 345
Adrar	5.6	17 584	7 537	7 768	2 105	1 503	49 963
H. Chargui	14.9	111 968	18 710	17 865	2 349	1 303	215 619
H. Gharbi	12.7	100 326	11 202	13 530	1 773	1 649	162 123
Brakna	19.6	88 410	20 486	21 252	1 217	2 968	186 931
Trarza	8.0	64 376	22 280	23 493	5 429	4 398	207 060
Inchiri	6.7	2 002	1 277	1 184	488	339	9 122
Tagant	12.9	27 609	6 700	6 972	1 124	847	57 160
Nouakchott	5,3	101 008	73 810	70 768	27 462	20 369	444 079

Source: Study of child labour in Mauritania, April 2004.

244. Child labour takes several forms in Mauritania:

- a) Traditional (herdsmen, farmers, etc.);
- b) Modern (domestic work, street vendors, carters, etc.).

Its essential purpose is to assist the family enterprise or provide the family with material support when its members are employees. Generally speaking, the conditions under which this work is performed are flexible, even if some of its forms are too harsh and border on exploitation.

245. Studies of this subject confirm that, except in the cases of girl domestic workers and street children, the working conditions are acceptable in comparison with what happens in other countries with the same level of development. It must be stressed that child workers in Mauritania represent only about 3.58 per cent of the population.

246. The Labour Code contains provisions on the protection of child workers: they may not be employed in certain sectors except when authorized by the Labour Minister; they are prohibited from working in certain other sectors for reasons of night work, health, and unhygienic conditions.

247. Against this background, the Ministry of Labour has ordered labour inspectors to do everything possible to combat and eliminate all child labour not in conformity with the law. In addition, the authorities have carried out several awareness-raising campaigns to put an end to the economic exploitation inflicted by some families on their children in the home. Two child-labour surveys are currently being carried out (on child carters in garages and on girl domestic workers) in Kiffa and Nouakchott to determine the possibilities of educating and training these young workers and securing their social reintegration.

248. A number of seminars have been held on child labour by civil society organizations, with emphasis on girl workers, in particular domestic workers.

249. Since the social tradition of mutual assistance has been eroded by the runaway urbanization resulting from the excessive exodus from the countryside, child labour is moving increasingly in the direction of economic exploitation, which the Government is fighting by legal, institutional, economic and social means capable of dealing with the dangers represented by this type of exploitation.

250. The revision of the Labour Code, the ratification of the two ILO conventions mentioned above, the Act on compulsory basic education, the Act on suppression of trafficking in persons, the Order on the judicial protection of children, and the Order on the criminalization and suppression of slavery and practices similar to slavery are helping to eliminate all forms of child labour.

251. The new Labour Code reinforces the guarantees protecting child workers by prohibiting children from working before the age of 14 unless a waiver has been obtained from the Labour Minister, by restricting night work, and by introducing the requirements of a certificate of fitness to work and periodical medical checks.

252. Act No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003 on suppression of trafficking in persons penalizes all forms of exploitation of children ("all unpaid work, forced work or services and similar practices [...] exploitation of the prostitution of others and other forms of sexual exploitation"). It also provides that the victim's consent "shall be deemed null and void" in the case of vulnerable persons such as children. This very important legal text is destined to eradicate harmful practices, including child labour, and incorporates the provisions of the Convention.

253. Order No. 2005-0015 of 5 December 2005 on the judicial protection of children contains provisions (arts. 60-62) explicitly penalizing the economic exploitation of children. A sentence of three years' imprisonment and a fine of 400,000 to 800,000 ouguiyas are imposed when the offence is committed against more than one child. This Order prohibits child labour before the age of 14, stipulates penalties for employing children in work which comprises their health or schooling, and holds parents and other persons having authority over a child criminally liable in the case of domestic work.

254. Several programmes have been introduced for girl domestic workers in order to make them more aware of their rights and their parents and employers, more aware of their obligations.

255. Since 2001 the El Mina Centre for Child Protection in Nouakchott has been carrying on various activities (training, literacy, hygiene, etc.) for girl domestic workers. A pilot programme on basic education was also carried out in Dar Naïm. It established a “Girls in difficult situations” unit.

256. Civil society organizations play an important part in training and awareness-raising activities. They have held several seminars, training courses and workshops in Nouakchott and in the interior of the country to improve the situation of all children in difficult situations and of girl domestic workers in particular.

2. Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (art. 34)

257. Mauritania has ratified the essential international and regional instruments on these subjects. It has acceded to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, and the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflicts.

258. At the same time Mauritania has equipped itself with an array of domestic instruments of a legislative and regulatory nature on the suppression of acts of exploitation and sexual violence. For example, Act No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2003 on suppression of trafficking in persons, articles 1, 2, 3 and 5 of which supplement the provisions of the Criminal Code concerning the crime of rape and related acts, and Order No. 2005-015 of 5 December 2005 on the judicial protection of children have strengthened the legal framework in these areas.

259. This legal framework is further supported by practical measures designed to protect children against sexual abuse. In 2004, for example, training modules were produced on reproductive health, STDs/AIDS, and peer education. Information, education and communication campaigns for girls have also been carried out. A psychological and social assistance programme has been introduced for victims of sexual violence, most of whom are minors.

260. In the context of the preparations for the second Arab-African Conference against Exploitation, Violence and Sexual Abuse of Children, held in Rabat in December 2004, Mauritania completed the country questionnaire on the sexual exploitation of children for the report of the UNESCO regional office on a regional analysis of the sexual exploitation of children in West and Central Africa. The recommendations of this Conference have been taken up, and a plan of action to combat this kind of exploitation has been formulated and adopted.

261. Awareness-raising campaigns on the implications of female genital mutilation for girls’ and women’s health are carried out on a regular basis. Doctors and *imams* are making their contribution to the dissemination of information about this harmful practice and its effects on health and to make it clear that female genital mutilation has no basis in religion. Article 12 of the Order on the juridical protection of children prohibits any interference with the sexual organ of a girl child and prescribes severe penalties for this practice. Furthermore, a programme on the promotion of human rights has been formulated and is being implemented in order to put an end to female genital mutilation, which has been condemned by Mauritanian *ulemas*. This work is being backed by a strategy of eradicating the practice by means of designating 6 February every year as the Day of zero tolerance of female genital mutilation. In addition to the units opened by

the Ministry of Health, other facilities reserved exclusively for children have been established. The Beyla Centre is one example.

3. Sale, trafficking and abduction (art. 35) and other forms of exploitation (art. 36)

262. In addition to adopting measures of a legislative nature, such as the Criminal Code, Act No. 2003-025 of 17 July 2005 on suppression of trafficking in persons, and Order No. 2005-013 of 5 December 2005 on the juridical protection of children, Mauritania has ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its Additional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

263. The children who fell victim to the traffic in child camel jockeys were repatriated to Mauritania in 2005. A plan of action has been adopted to attend to their reintegration in their families. A technical committee has been set up to monitor this matter.

CONCLUSION

264. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania reiterates its determination to fulfil its treaty obligations with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights. This determination is manifest in the adoption of legislative, regulatory, administrative, judicial and other measures to improve children's living conditions and protect them against all forms of exploitation. Constraints and shortcomings do of course persist and they impede children's development, but the Government will spare no effort to advance children's harmonious development in juridical, economic, social and cultural terms.

265. The Islamic Republic of Mauritania reaffirms its commitment to the ideals and values embodied in the Convention and stands ready to pursue a fruitful and constructive dialogue with the Committee on all measures which may contribute to the welfare of the country's children.
