

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

**WRITTEN REPLIES BY THE GOVERNMENT OF MAURITANIA
CONCERNING THE LIST OF ISSUES
(CRC/C/Q/MAU/1)**

**RECEIVED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
RELATING TO THE CONSIDERATION OF THE INITIAL REPORT
OF MAURITANIA
(CRC/C/8/Add.42)**

[Received on 16 August 2001]

**Mauritania: Additional report on the implementation of
the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

At the request of the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its twenty-eighth session, the State party has the honour to transmit the following additional and updated information in accordance with the guidelines contained in document CRC/C/Q/MAU/1.

**PART I
A. Date and statistics**

Table 1: General data

	1998	1999	2000
Number of children under 18, including (in thousands): ¹	1 343	1 383	1 423
boys	679	698	715
girls	684	684	708
urban	- ²	-	-
rural	-	-	-
0 to 6 years of age	602	619	556
13 to 18 years of age	337	347	357
Rates of infant and child mortality (0/00)	155	140	-
urban	-	-	112
rural	-	-	-
boys	-	-	-
girls	-	-	-
Proportion of children with low birth weight (Health Information System (SNIS) Yearbook, 2000):	3.8%		
urban			
rural			
Proportion of children affected by acute and chronic malnutrition (%): ³	23	-	-
urban	19	-	-
rural	27	-	-
Number of children with disabilities either taken care of at home or living in institutions (in Nouakchott)	2 530	-	-
Number of orphans and abandoned children living either in institutions or in family placement ⁴	135		

¹ On the basis of projections published by the National Statistical Office (ONS) (December 1996).

² Figure not available.

³ 1995 figure (multiple indicator cluster survey (MICS)).

⁴ In the Nouakchott orphanage, but 286 are in institutions for children at moral risk, according to a survey carried out in the three main cities in 1997 (Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Rosso).

Table 2: Estimate of budget data

As a percentage of the national budget	1998	1999	2000
Education:	17.9	17.0	17.5
primary	7.2	-	-
secondary	4.3	-	-
higher	2.8	-	-
Health care:	5.54	5.43	5.78
primary	2.21	2.17	2.31
vaccination programmes ¹	-	-	-
Children with disabilities ²	-	-	-
Protection of children in need of alternative care	-	-	-
Juvenile justice ³	-	-	-

Sources: Based on the Finance Acts. Details have been given for 1998 only on the basis of the conclusions of the 20/20 Study.

¹ Apart from expenditure on personnel, approximately 40 million ouguiyas are earmarked for the purchase of vaccines and programme operation.

² Negligible. Direct budget allocations are restricted to 5 million ouguiyas for the national Orthopaedic and Functional Rehabilitation Centre (CNORF), 2 million for the School for the Blind and 2 million for the Child Protection Centre.

³ In addition to staff costs, approximately 8.4 million ouguiyas are earmarked for the Bayla Juvenile Detention Centre.

These data are estimates taken primarily from the Finance Acts. It has not been possible, however, to disaggregate them by sex and background. They relate only to the central level and are actually proportions of the government operating budget forecast for the reference years.

The unavailability of subsectoral data has meant that a trial-and-error approach has had to be adopted on the basis of the proportions used in the 20/20 Study (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development (MAED) and UNICEF, July 2000).

The subsectors' share of official development assistance (ODA) is even more difficult to assess. According to data from the above-mentioned 20/20 Study, primary education received 1.9 per cent of ODA in 1998, while the health sector as a whole obtained 6.8 per cent on average between 1992 and 1998.

Table 3: Violations against children

	1998	1999	2000
Number of cases of violations against children	-	-	-
Number of reports requiring follow-up	-	-	-

Table 4: Data on education

	1998	1999	2000
Rate of literacy (percentage):			
under 15 years of age	19.3	20.4	
over 15 years of age	50.8 ¹		56.5
Enrolment in percentage of children in primary schools:	86	85.5	83.4
boys		87.6	
girls		83.5	81.3
Enrolment in percentage of children in secondary schools (percentage of the population aged 15-17):	12.7	13.7	14.5
boys			19
girls			10
Percentage of enrolled children completing primary school:	53		
boys	54.4		
girls	51.3		
Percentage of enrolled children completing secondary school:	15.4		
boys	19.8		
girls	12		
Percentage of drop-outs from primary school: ²	47		
boys	44		
girls	50		
Enrolment in Koranic schools ³	-		
boys	-		
girls	-		
Children with disabilities integrated into regular schools ⁴	5%		
boys	-	-	-
girls	-		

¹ 1995 official figure.

² Data from the Ministry of National Education (MEN).

³ There are no reliable statistics, but, according to a survey by the services of the Secretariat of State for Literacy and Traditional Teaching (SEAE0), in theory, there are 1,728 *mahadras* of all categories. They are attended by 67 per cent of boys and 33 per cent of girls, with a total of 103,831 pupils, accounting for 8 per cent of all children at school in Mauritania.

⁴ Figure taken from the 1997 survey (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs). During the 1999/2000 school year, 210 disabled children in Nouakchott and 50 in Atar were integrated into public schools by a non-governmental organization.

Table 5: Adolescent health

	1998	1999	2000
Number of cases of STDs ¹	3 662	-	-
boys	-	-	-
girls	-	-	-
Number of HIV infections (children) ²	350	-	-
Number of AIDS cases	-	-	-
Early pregnancy (percentage) ³	-	-	27.8
Force-feeding (percentage) ⁴	-	-	21.7
Female genital mutilation (excisions) (percentage)	-	-	71.3
Number of cases of drug abuse	-	-	-

Sources: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and preliminary results of the Mauritanian population and health survey for 2000.

¹ There are few data available, but the SNIS Statistical Yearbook (July 2000) reports that there were 6,808 new consultations for STDs in 1998, the majority for gonorrhoea. We have extrapolated these data - which are in fact under-reported - to the population concerned (under 18 years of age).

² According to the most recent estimates, there are thought to be 6,100 carriers, including 350 children, 1,116 new infections, 1,900 deaths overall and 1,400 AIDS orphans.

³ Girls married between 15 and 19 years of age, according to data from the Mauritanian population and health survey, preliminary report, July 2001.

⁴ Idem.

Table 6: Children in conflict with the law

	1998	1999	2000
Number of children who have allegedly committed a crime	97	106	133
Number of children sentenced by courts:	-	29	124
boys	-	26	120
girls	-	3	4
Penalties:	-	-	-
immediate imprisonment	-	32	121
suspended sentence	-	-	-
other penalties	-	-	-
Immediate imprisonment (number of children sentenced):	76	32	121
less than one year	-	-	-
between one and five years	-	-	-
more than five years	0	-	-
Number of cases of recidivism	-	-	-
Number of cases of ill-treatment during detention	-	-	-

Table 7: Children requiring special protection measures

	1998	1999	2000
Number of applications for asylum or refugee status	0	0	0
Number of victims of sexual exploitation	-	-	-
Number of consumers of psychotropic substances	-	-	10 ¹
Number of street children (Nouakchott)	383 ²	-	-
Number of child beggars (Nouakchott) ³	33	-	55
Number of child workers (Nouakchott) ⁴	-	-	85 ⁵

¹ In Nouakchott.

² The NGO AEDM, Annual activity report 2000.

³ On the basis of a study made in 2001 for the Commissariat aux droits de l'Homme, à la Lutte Contre la Pauvreté et à l'Insertion (CDHLCP); the figure for 2000 was obtained by extrapolation.

⁴ There are no recent statistics, but a 1996 DAS survey in three major cities of Mauritania showed that 30.3 per cent were apprentices in garages, 26.7 per cent street vendors, 17 per cent carters, 12.2 per cent car washers, 5 per cent pump attendants and 5 per cent shoe-shiners.

⁵ AEDM, Activity report 2000.

B. General measures of implementation

1. In accordance with its principles and commitments, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania does not intend to withdraw its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. Efforts have since been made to comply with the commitments made:
 - Adoption of a new Labour Code in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
 - Recent adoption by Parliament of a Personal Status Code, inter alia, restricting the minimum age for marriage to 18 years;
 - The studies on the introduction of a new Penal Code and a Code of Criminal Procedure adapted to children are very well advanced. Their adoption is planned for the near future;
 - Juvenile judges have now been trained and specialized courts established in all the main towns of the *wilayas* (regions).
3. A ministerial department (Secretariat of State for the Status of Women (SECF)) is responsible for the overall coordination of activities relating to children. The National Children's Council (CNE) has been established to ensure more effective coordination. It is composed of representatives from all central and regional administrations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the implementation of the Convention. An annual plan of action is discussed and adopted. Two follow-up and evaluation meetings are held each year.
4. Autonomous and independent regulatory and appeals mechanisms have been studied. For the time being, it has been possible, through the establishment of a municipal Children's Council, to play this role only partially. There are also plans to appoint a children's ombudsman, who will be authorized to bring children's problems before the courts and, if necessary, file complaints.
5. The first mid-term evaluation was made in 1996 in the light of data from the National Plan of Action (1992/2001 PAN). A more detailed review was made when the national end-of-decade report was drawn up. Preliminary studies are under way and will serve as a basis for the forthcoming 2002/2012 PAN.
6. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also requires greater awareness, not only on the part of professionals in the sector, but also on that of decision makers and the population in general. The following activities have therefore been carried out:

- Seminars for creating awareness of the Convention: in March 1997, for Government officials and civil society actors (lawyers, journalists, women parliamentarians, *mahadra* teachers, etc.). The seminar on children and development enabled 70 representatives of civil society to familiarize themselves with the culture of the rights of the child. In 1999, the SECF held an awareness-raising information seminar on the Convention for NGOs working with children. The Ministry of Justice organized encounters on juvenile justice and children in conflict with the law in May 1999. One month later, it was the SECF's turn, with support from UNICEF, to organize awareness-raising workshops with Mauritania's parliamentarians. Two general assemblies brought together 33 mayors of communes for the establishment of an association known as the Mauritanian Mayors' Initiative as Child Defenders for the Protection of Children (IMMDE).
- Annual workshops on Arab and African children provide opportunities for awareness-raising on questions of children's rights.
- A friendship and fraternity among children week was organized in Sélibaby by the Ministry of Youth and Sport.
- Several surveys and studies were carried out on children and their rights, including one on children's opinion of their rights and another on the status of "talibé" children.
- The establishment of several local radio stations (Aftout FM Barkéol, Radio jeunesse, Nouadhibou, Radio Femmes, Aleg, and Radio Femmes et développement, Rosso) ensured media coverage of all events involving children: their survival, development and protection.
- Other initiatives were taken on behalf of other educational sectors, particularly basic education, to include the concerns reflected in the Convention in school textbooks. The National Education Institute (IPN) is responsible for dissemination.

PART II

Copies of the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Two versions of the text of the Convention are currently available in Arabic (official language) and French, the two languages regularly used in Mauritania. The contents of the Convention have been widely disseminated by means of the information and awareness-raising campaigns and round tables organized by the SECF. It may be noted that IEC activities are scheduled in three regions (Brakna, Trarza and Guidimaka) for August 2001.

PART III

Programmes, legislation, policies and institutions

1. Legislative measures

Several legal texts have been adopted to strengthen, harmonize or fill an earlier gap. Reference will be made only to the most important texts in terms of the new requirements and the commitments made in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- The Personal Status Code just adopted by Parliament prohibits early marriage and requires the consent of the woman concerned. It fills a legal gap in formalities for marriage, divorce and the settlement of family disputes.
- The amended Labour Code prohibits child labour before the age of 16.
- The act making basic education compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 provides for penalties in the form of fines for offenders according to very stringent monitoring procedures.
- Act No. 96019 of 19 June 1996 establishes a system of family names, giving all children the right to a name and an identity in accordance with the Convention (arts. 7 and 8). It requires parents to give their family name to their descendants, subject to penalties.

2. New institutions

- The National Children's Council (CNE) is presided over by an adviser to the Prime Minister and in addition to the representatives of the ministries concerned with children's questions, is composed of seven representatives of civil society. It is an advisory group whose main responsibility is to assist the SECF in designing and implementing government policy on children.
- The Mauritanian Mayors' Initiative for the Protection of Children (IMMDE) is above all a decentralized instrument for the advocacy and popularization of children's rights.
- The Parliamentary Children's Group was established in May 1999 as part of a policy for increasing awareness and finding persons to defend the cause of children.
- The Municipal Children's Council is an elected Nouakchott body, which gives children their first opportunity to familiarize themselves with public life and to discuss problems and solutions proposed for children.

- The meeting of children’s organizations is a twice-yearly meeting of all participants involved in matters relating to children (Government, development partners and NGOs) held to review the situation, the progress made and the action to be taken. It is a global framework for consultation, exchanges and discussions.
- Children’s NGOs, which have increased in number in recent years. Some are very active. They have been given support for greater specialization and professionalization, as well as the improved coordination of their activities.

3. Policies and programmes implemented

- Family policy: A qualitative study of the family in Mauritania has been carried out and a legal framework adapted to the national context has been defined. It is in this framework that IEC (information, education, communication) activities have been carried out, a “family month” introduced, “productive family” projects initiated and many family disputes resolved. Networks organized within civil society will henceforth contribute to the protection of the family and children. They play an active role in all children-related events.
- National Strategy for Young Children: Specific practical measures have been taken to ensure the harmonious development and adequate protection of young children. A major “young children” component has been planned as part of the “Education VI” project. The strengthening of community crèches, a training system for trainers, the adaptation of programmes and support for Resource and Nutrition Centres for Poor Children are under review.
- Adolescent health: In view of the numerical importance of adolescents in the age pyramid (over 50 per cent of Mauritania’s total population is under 18 years of age), the authorities pay particular attention to them. In a context of increasingly rapid urbanization and declining morals, STDs and HIV/AIDS are a serious threat to the future of generations to come. The reproductive health programme gives adolescents priority by preparing specific IEC activities for them.
- School Canteen Project: The Department of Assistance Projects for School Canteens and Health and Dietary Education is responsible for the project. In the short term, its objectives are to increase the school enrolment of girls and reduce the drop-out rate. Incentives are being provided in the form of rations in all school canteens. A dietary supplement is also provided for children from underprivileged sectors. The health

and dietary aspect of the education is designed to improve regular attendance, equality of opportunity and children's health. Schools with canteens are encouraged to create an agreeable school environment by providing gardens and market gardening activities. There are plans to promote the creation of health and hygiene clubs in schools. Had means not been so modest, other activities would have been programmed.

- NUTRICOM nutrition programme: This is a novel approach based on two types of action to combat malnutrition in rural and in peri-urban areas. The beneficiaries of the project are children aged 0 to 3 and nursing mothers (first six months) or pregnant women (last three months). Financing amounts to \$5.3 million, the larger share (4.9) from an IDA loan and the rest from State budget funds.
- School enrolment of girls: The Girls' School Enrolment Support Fund (FAF) was created as a unit of the Basic Education Department in 1997 as part of the Education V project. Its purpose is to provide support to increase the enrolment rate of girls in the five regions of Mauritania which are the least developed in this regard. Activities to date have focused on the communication and awareness components. Thirteen multimedia campaigns were conducted using all the mass media (radio, TV, newspapers, resource persons and leaders of opinion). Prizes are distributed annually to deserving girls during a solemn ceremony presided over by Mauritania's highest authorities. Two major local communications media networks have been set up: 66 local hostesses for the enrolment of girls distributed three to each *moughataa* (prefecture); 22 associations of "teaching mothers" operate in the 22 *moughataa* targeted.
- Specific child protection programmes: The Social Affairs Department includes a juvenile supervision division. Its purpose is to help certain categories of children, including street children, beggars, child workers, disabled children, abandoned children, unmarried mothers, maids and drop-outs. During the year, the public services had to take care of 167 girls in a precarious situation, including 38 at moral risk. An annual average of seven living abandoned children are taken in and given to adoptive parents. In 2001, 39 children in a precarious situation, including 26 girls, have benefited from government care and support.