REPORT SUMMARY: Privatisation, commercialisation, and sale of public schools in Mauritania

This is a summary of the full report available [here](#).

The Mauritanian education system rapidly privatised over the last 20 years, following the authorisation and promotion of private education by the Government, and because of the lack of regulation and supervision of private actors in education. This *de facto* privatisation has been accompanied by an increasing commercialisation of education through, the auctioning of public-school grounds since 2015 to transform them into commercial premises.

1. Private schools are progressing rapidly in the Mauritanian education system

   The share of students in the private education sector has increased more than eightfold in only 16 years. A phenomenon of this magnitude necessarily requires special attention and support to ensure that it does not undermine the right to education.

2. The growth of private actors in the Mauritanian education system contributes to creating divides according to household income

   Only the most affluent people in Mauritania (20%), who are able to spend four times more on primary education than the poorest families (40%), can enrol their children in private schools of good quality. Even in the case of the so-called "low cost" schools, with tuition fees promoted as low, these remain an obstacle to access to these schools for many families. These registration fees can be a major reason of de-schooling for families unable to pay them.
3. Low public education spending limits the quality of public schools and encourages privatisation of education

Mauritania’s share of GDP allocated to education has fluctuated between 2.5 and 3.5% of GDP between 1999 and 2013, before falling back to 2.63% in 2016. These figures are far from the minimum accepted international standards, i.e. 6% of GDP and 20% of public expenditure. They are also much lower than neighbouring countries, like Senegal, which devotes more than 7% of its GDP and more than 20% of its public expenditure to education since 2013, or Morocco, which is above 5% of GDP for education.

4. Public schools lands were sold and transformed into commercial premises

The Mauritanian education system is marked by an increasing commercialisation in recent years. This was expressed in Nouakchott particularly by the sale of lands by the Mauritanian State in 2015 through auctions, without prior public consultation, of six public schools’ grounds in the city center of Nouakchott, for the benefit of private businesses.

List of public schools that were closed following the auction of the grounds housing them:

- Ecole 1
- Ecole 2
- Ecole 6
- Ecole 7
- Ecole Tvragh Zeina
- Ecole 12

5. Private schools in Mauritania are not sufficiently regulated

Although Mauritania has established a regulatory framework for private schools, it remains largely theoretical and suffers from major shortcomings in its implementation. Even the World Bank, in the 2016 SABER country report, therefore recommended the implementation of "more inspections and follow-up action as well establishing sanctions for school improvement".1

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### Suggestions of questions to Mauritania

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<td>a.</td>
<td>Can Mauritania explain the reason for the closing of 6 public schools in Nouakchott, and indicate what measures have been and will be taken to provide access to an equivalent public school to the children affected, and to ensure that no child be affected in the future by commercialisation of school grounds?</td>
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<td>b.</td>
<td>What measures does Mauritania intend to take to ensure that schooling in a quality public school is guaranteed for all children, even for those who do not immediately have civil status papers?</td>
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<td>c.</td>
<td>Does Mauritania intend to increase its budget allocated to education, which is particularly low, below 3% of GDP, in order to reach the minimum international target of 6% of GDP or 20% of budget allocated to education, in accordance with Mauritania's obligation to devote the maximum of its available resources to the achievement of the right to education?</td>
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<td>d.</td>
<td>How can Mauritania explain the reduction of classrooms in public schools, although there are still many children out of school, and the very strong and rapid increase of poorly regulated private schools?</td>
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<td>e.</td>
<td>Why does Mauritania support the development of private education, when the state does not seem able yet to effectively regulate these schools, and when empirical studies show that the increase in private supply has not been a solution either in Mauritania, or in many countries, for the realisation of the right to education, especially for the poorest?</td>
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<td>f.</td>
<td>What measures does Mauritania intend to take to ensure effective monitoring and regulation of private schools, including low-cost private schools, in accordance with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child?</td>
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<td>g.</td>
<td>Given that previous reforms have failed to guarantee the realisation of the right to education without discrimination, can Mauritania provide the time frame within which it plans to effectively address the issues of segregation and discrimination in the education system, as a priority?</td>
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## Recommendations to the Mauritanian Government

The Mauritanian Government must:

a. Urgently find a free and quality education solution available for all children who have been affected by the closure of the six schools in Nouakchott, and a long-term solution for the families who live in these areas, including if necessary by rebuilding public schools.

b. Put in place an action plan to improve the quality of public education in Mauritania, giving priority support to children from marginalized or vulnerable families, including the descendants of slaves, though, amongst other things, the immediate increase of the financial investment in the public education sector, in order to achieve the minimum international target of 6% of GDP or 20% of budget allocated to education, in line with Mauritania’s obligation to devote the maximum of its available resources for the realisation of the right to education. These expenditures should help improve public schools, in particular to:
   - Create canteens and school kiosks for the sale of low priced school supplies or their free distribution in the most disadvantaged areas.
   - Work for inclusive education ensuring physical access to schools for children with disabilities and learning materials for the deaf and blind.
   - Create socio-cultural and sports activities in schools.
   - Promote the teaching of national languages to facilitate community coexistence.
   - Facilitate access to education for migrant children and those in mobility situations.
   - Develop an urban and peri-urban transport policy for remote children, especially for girls.
   - Introduce human rights education into the curriculum from primary school.

c. Implement its obligations regarding the education system, in accordance with the Human Rights Guiding Principles on private actors in education\(^2\), particularly by:
   - Assessing the direct and indirect impacts of the development of private education, in the light of its obligations to ensure that it complements but does not supplant public education and does not promote discrimination.
   - Taking all necessary measures to avoid any direct or indirect negative impact of the private sector of education, and to ensure that the private sector contributes to the realization of the right to education for all in Mauritania; and enforce, review and amend, if necessary, the laws and policies governing providers.
   - Strictly applying the regulations in force governing and organizing private education.

d. Stopping the closure of public schools, especially in favor of commercial entities, unless there is a free quality alternative available to all families, following an appropriate participatory process.

e. Develop and provide the necessary resources to the bodies in charge of controlling the quality of private education institutions, so that they respect human rights and do not have a negative impact on public education.

f. Work towards the participation of parents of students in the management of public and private school infrastructures, by setting up a council of parents of students.

gh. Establish a lasting and inclusive framework for consultation between the state, development partners and civil society.

h. Allow access to the civil status to all children and facilitate free registration.

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Concluding observations on the combined third to fifth periodic reports of Mauritania from the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - 11 October 2018

All concluding observations on Mauritania by the CRC available [here](#).

35. The Committee welcomes the National Programme for the Development of the Education Sector 2011-2020 and the integration of human rights education into the school curriculum but reiterates it previous concerns regarding the poor quality of education, low transition rates to secondary school and insufficient monitoring of private and Koranic schools (see CRC/C/MRT/CO/2, para. 66). It is also deeply concerned about the recent closure with no apparent replacement of six public schools in Nouakchott, the high illiteracy rates, the limited availability of preschool education and primary schools, and the proliferation of private schools that make quality education prohibitively expensive for children living in disadvantaged or vulnerable situations.

36. Taking note of targets 4.1 and 4.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals on ensuring that by 2030 all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education and have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education, the Committee recalls its previous recommendations (CRC/C/MRT/CO/2, para. 66) and recommends that the State party:

(a) **Enhance efforts to increase the quality of education throughout the State party, including by providing continuous training of teachers, constructing and improving educational facilities and schools, including in the rural areas, and strengthening vocational education programmes;**

(b) **Eliminate all hidden costs of education and increase access to secondary education;**

(c) **Adopt and implement national standards and technical regulations on water, sanitation, hygiene and nutrition for all educational institutions, including Koranic schools, and establish monitoring mechanisms and tools for their enforcement;**

(d) **Develop a policy aimed at monitoring the quality of Koranic schools, particularly in terms of their structure, management and curriculums;**

(e) **Reduce the discriminatory effects of privatization and private education against children from financially disadvantaged families and establish mechanisms to monitor the compliance of private schools with minimum educational standards, curriculum requirements and qualifications for teachers.**