

Knowledge Institutions in Africa and their development 1960-2020 Mauritania

Introduction

This report about the development of the knowledge institutions in Mauritania was made as part of the preparations for the AfricaKnows! Conference (2 December 2020 – 28 February 2021) in Leiden, and elsewhere, see www.africaknows.eu.



Reports like these can never be complete, and there might also be mistakes. Additions and corrections are welcome! Please send those to dietzaj@asc.leidenuniv.nl

Highlights

- 1 Mauritania's population increased from 850,000 in 1960, the year of its political independence, via 2.0 million in 1990 to 4.6 million in 2020.
- 2 The adult literacy rate is relatively low for African standards: 54% (64% for men and 43% for women). Mean Years of Schooling for Adults increased from 2.2 years in 1990 to 4.6 years in 2018.
- 3 The Education Index (part of the human development index) increased from .178 in 1990 to .389 in 2018, very low for African standards, despite recent improvements.
- 4 Currently the net primary school enrolment is 80% and net secondary school enrolment 31%, both with a fairly equal representation of boys and girls. The expected Years of Schooling for Children increased from 3.7 years in 1990 to 8.5 years in 2018.
- 5 Regional inequality was extreme for all variables in 1990, but diminished a lot recently.
- 6 Gross tertiary education enrolment is only 5%, with 20,000 students in Mauritania's higher education institutions. In addition there are 4,600 students abroad.
- 7 Mauritania only has six tertiary knowledge institutions: three public ones and three private ones.
- 8 We listed five think tanks and five museums in the country.

Part 1: The Story

Mauritania's demographic and education development

Officially called the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, the North-western African country used to be a French colony from the 19th century until its independence on November 28 1960¹. The country is 1.03 million kilometres-squared, divided into 12 regions, officially speaks French but has local languages like Haratin, Arab-Berber and Fulani. Since independence Mauritania has had 9 presidents and of the 9 presidents, 5 have been deposed or ousted via a coup d'état. Their first president was Moktar Ould Daddah who was in power for the period 1960-1978 before being deposed and the current president Mohammed Ould Ghazouani (elected in 2019) is one of the few to ascend to power via elections.

The Mauritanian population has boomed over the last 60 years. In 1960 850,000 Mauritians were counted in the census and in 2020 the new census result amounted to 4.6 million inhabitants. Of these 4.6 million, 57% can be found in urban areas compared to only 7% in 1960. The most densely populated area is Nouakchott, the capital city, and currently an agglomeration of close to 1.3 million inhabitants. Despite being one of the biggest territories worldwide (surface area of 1.03 million km²), the population density of Mauritania is just four people per km² and this is because three-quarters of the country are desert or semi-desert. The sex ratio is 1.02 males to females. The 0-14 years old age group in Mauritania accounts for 40% of the population, 57% range between 15-64 years old and make up the working age population, while the remaining 3% are people of 65 years and older. The life expectancy also boomed: from 40 years in 1950 to 66 years old in 2020².

Literacy and enrolment

Education is compulsory in Mauritania from age 6 to 14: nine years. However, net primary enrolment figures are not yet 100%, and the adult literacy rate was only 54% (men 64% and women 43%). In 2017 there were 657,000 children of primary school age (6-11), 659,000 children of secondary school age (12-18) and 406,000 young adults of tertiary school age (19-23)³.

The number of enrolled students in Mauritanian primary and secondary educations increased from 59% in 2000 and 14% in respectively 2001 to 80% and 31% respectively in 2018. The ratio of boys to girls is fairly equal. When it comes to the tertiary level of education, less students are enrolled. The 18-25 years old constitute roughly 10% of the population as well as the age group for university students. But only 4.9% of this 10% pursue their studies to university level or equivalent in 2017. The total number of students in Mauritanian higher education institutions is currently 20,000. In addition, on average 4,600 Mauritanian students studied abroad in 2012-2017⁴, and the most important destination

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritania>

² <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/mauritania-population/>

³ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/mr>

⁴ https://ressources.campusfrance.org/publications/mobilite_pays/en/mauritanie_en.pdf

countries were Saudi Arabia, France, and Morocco. There are very few foreign students in Mauritania.

| | Enrolled 1978/1985/2001 (%) | Enrolled 2017/2018 (%) | Female enrolment 2017/2018 (%) | Male enrolment 2017/2018 (%) |
|------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Primary | 59.10 (1985) | 79.9 (2018) | 80.9 (2018) | 78.3 (2018) |
| Secondary | 13.50 (2001) | 31.0 (2018) | 31.7 (2018) | 30.3 (2018) |
| University | 0.375 (1978) | 4.90 (2017) | 3.30 (2017) | 6.62 (2017) |

Regional differentiation of education results in Mauritania, 1990-2018

The information provided by the Globaldatalab about the subregional human development index, its components and its indicators (<https://globaldatalab.org/shdi>) provides data for the period between 1990 and 2018, and uses xxx regions. Between 1990 and 2018 the population of Mauritania as a whole increased with 217%, but regional differences are considerable: from 300% in Tagant to stagnation in Inchiri.

The Globaldatalab provides data about the education index (one of the three indexes that together form the Human Development Index), and about two relevant indicators: mean years of schooling, showing the average education level of the adult population per region, and expected years of education, showing the expected number of years current children will attend schools. This excludes the religious, koranic schools and only deals with the official, state-based, school system.

We present the data for the years 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2018 (the latest year available at the moment). See tables 1-4 in part 2.

Education index

The education index is one of the elements of the human development index and for Mauritania it shows a consistent improvement (from .178 in 1990 to .389 in 2018), and does so everywhere, but starting at very low levels in 1990. In 1990 and 2000 Inchiri was the best education region, but that position shifted to Nouadhibia and Nouakchott in 2010, and to Tiris-Zemmour in 2018. The worst region used to be Guidimagha in the south, and that position has shifted to Gorgol in 2010. Guidimagha showed the fastest growth, and Inchiri the slowest. Regional inequality was high in 1990, but it gradually became less extreme.

Mean Years of Schooling for Adults

According to UNESCO, 'Mean Years of Schooling' is an indicator about the "average number of completed years of education of a country's population aged 25 years and older, excluding years spent repeating individual grades"⁵. In 1990 Mauritania had one of the lowest levels in the whole of Africa, but gradually and consistently this improved: from 2.2 years in 1990 to

⁵ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/mean-years-schooling>

4.6 years in 2018 for the country as a whole. The best region has always been Nouadhiba, in 2018 together with Nouakchott. The worst region shifted from Guidimagha to Gorgol, and Guidimagha experienced the fastest improvements. Inchiri in the northwest and Hodh Gharbi in the southeast experienced the slowest developments. The extreme regional inequality of 1990 and 2000 became considerably lower in 2010 and 2018.

Expected Years of Schooling for Children

UNDP defines the ‘expected years of schooling’ as the: “Number of years of schooling that a child of school entrance age can expect to receive if prevailing patterns of age-specific enrolment rates persist throughout the child’s life”⁶. For Mauritania progress has been rapid, from a very low base level in 1990 (3.7 years; in 2018 it was 8.5 years). And with one exception the improvements have been rapid everywhere (the exception is Inchiri, with deterioration between 2000 and 2010, and a lower figure in 2018 than in 2000). The best region used to be Nouadhiba but that has shifted to Adrar. The worst region used to be Guidimargha but that region has made most progress. In 2010 and 2018 the worst region was Gorgol. Regional inequality was very high in 1990 and 2000, but became modest afterwards.

Mauritania’s tertiary knowledge development

Mauritania has six higher-educations institutions of which three are state-owned and the remaining three are private; one of them having a religious Islamic affiliation. The country equally possesses a few think tanks as well as museums for the creation of policies and preservation and sharing of Mauritanian history/culture respectively. In terms of universities, the table below shows the development of the universities within the country. None of the universities belongs to the Africa top-200, according to 4icu⁷.

Mauritania Universities 1960-2020

| Type | 1960 | 1965 | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 | 2020 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Public | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| Private Relig. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Private Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 6 |

Public universities

⁶ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/expected-years-schooling-children-years>

⁷ <https://www.4icu.org/top-universities-africa/>



University of Nouakchott: facebook

The public universities in Mauritania are as many as the private institutions, which is unusual in African countries. But just like all African countries, the public universities have more students than the privately owned ones. In fact, of the population attending higher-education programs, roughly 10% are in private colleges. The National School of Administration, Journalism and Magistracy is the oldest in the country, founded six years after independence of Mauritania, whereas the biggest is the University of Nouakchott with over 8000 students according to the 4ICU website. These universities (including the private Université Libanaise Internationale en Mauritanie) offer at the very least certificates in various fields of higher-education: medical, business, politics, law, science and technology. The University of Nouakchott is home to the Confucius Institute in Mauritania via a partnership with the Hebei University in China. Besides that, the university offers a possibility of doing a BSc, MSc or PhD programme. This is especially true for PhD at the Université Libanaise Internationale en Mauritanie. There are increasing partnerships between Mauritanian and foreign-based universities, which in the long will help to improve the level of higher education in Mauritania. All universities are localised in the capital city of the country. This limits access to higher-education for those who live elsewhere. See table 5 in part 2.

Private Universities



Université Libanaise Internationale en Mauritanie:

<https://mr.liu.edu.lb/MauritaniaFrench/annonce/visit/m1.jpg>

Private Universities started in Mauritania as early as 1979 with the Institut Supérieur d'Etudes et de Recherche Islamiques. The two other private universities in Mauritania are subsidiaries of a foreign university (Université Libanaise Internationale en Mauritanie, and Sup' Management Mauritanie/ Université Intercontinentale Libre). Both are located in Nouakchott. More details can be found in table 6 in part 2.

Think Tanks

Mauritania possesses a few institutions, which play the same or similar roles as think tanks. Some of them are affiliated to the United Nations (such as Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement⁸), or by foreign agencies, or they were set up by the Mauritanian government (such as the Office National de la Statistique⁹). Table 7 in part 2 gives a list of five organisations which are recognised in the think tank category and which could be verified.

Museums



National Museum of Mauritania: <https://moma.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/National-Museum-of-Mauritania-1024x568.png>


There are five known museums in Mauritania and they are mostly state owned. They are located in Nouakchott, Ciudad Valles and Chinguetti. The oldest and biggest is the National Museum of Mauritania. A list of the museums in Mauritania can be found in table 8 in part 2.

⁸ McGann, James G., "2018 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report" (2019). TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports. 16.

⁹ <http://www.sesric.org>

Part 2 : The Data

Map and table 1: Mauritania: Regions and Population 1990 and 2018

| Map | Region / Région | Population x 1000 | | '18/ '90 |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | 1990 | 2018 | |
|  | Adrar | 50 | 100 | 2.00 |
| | Assaba | 190 | 470 | 2.47 |
| | Brakna | 200 | 420 | 2.10 |
| | Gorgol | 220 | 390 | 1.77 |
| | Guidimagha | 130 | 310 | 2.38 |
| | Hodh Charghi | 200 | 480 | 2.40 |
| | Hodh Gharbi | 210 | 340 | 1.62 |
| | Inchiri | 10 | 10 | 1.00 |
| | Nouadhibia | 80 | 140 | 1.75 |
| | Tagant | 40 | 120 | 3.00 |
| | Tiris-Zemmour | 30 | 70 | 2.33 |
| | Trarza/ Nouakchott | 700 | 1560 | 2.23 |
| | Total Mauritania | | 2030 | 4400 |

Source : <https://globaldatalab.org> 4.0 ; map : <https://www.worldatlas.com/upload/69/e3/3a/regions-of-mauritania-map.png>

Table 2: Mauritania: Education index 1990-2018¹⁰

| Region | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2018 | 2018/1990 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Adrar | 195 | 308 | 388 | 450 | 2.31 |
| Assaba | 146 | 233 | 277 | 321 | 2.20 |
| Brakna | 135 | 215 | 318 | 370 | 2.74 |
| Gorgol | 111 | 177 | 227 | 266 | 2.40 |
| Guidimagha | 83 | 135 | 241 | 281 | 3.39 |
| Hodh Charghi | 163 | 255 | 272 | 318 | 1.95 |
| Hodh Gharbi | 167 | 265 | 255 | 298 | 1.78 |
| Inchiri | 249 | 392 | 372 | 418 | 1.68 |
| Nouadhibia | 231 | 356 | 417 | 485 | 2.10 |
| Tagant | 150 | 237 | 331 | 385 | 2.57 |
| Tiris-Zemmour | 228 | 355 | 416 | 489 | 2.14 |
| Trarza/ Nouakchott | 234 | 363 | 417 | 475 | 2.03 |

¹⁰ The HDI data, and its components go from 0 (worst level) to 1 (best level). We present the figures x 1000. The inequality figure is the highest value divided by the lowest value in a particular year.

| | | | | | |
|------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Total | 178 | 279 | 338 | 389 | 2.19 |
| Inequality | 3.0 | 2.9 | 1.8 | 1.7 | |

Table 3: Mauritania, Regional data for ‘mean years of schooling for adults’

| Region | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2018 | 2018/1990 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Adrar | 2.2 | 2.9 | 4.2 | 5.2 | 2.36 |
| Assaba | 1.5 | 2.0 | 3.1 | 3.8 | 2.53 |
| Brakna | 1.5 | 2.0 | 3.0 | 3.8 | 2.53 |
| Gorgol | 1.2 | 1.6 | 1.9 | 2.5 | 2.08 |
| Guidimagha | 0.7 | 1.0 | 2.1 | 2.6 | 3.71 |
| Hodh Charghi | 2.0 | 2.6 | 2.8 | 3.6 | 1.80 |
| Hodh Gharbi | 1.8 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 3.1 | 1.72 |
| Inchiri | 2.9 | 3.9 | 4.3 | 5.0 | 1.72 |
| Nouadhiba | 3.3 | 4.5 | 5.5 | 6.8 | 2.06 |
| Tagant | 1.7 | 2.3 | 3.5 | 4.4 | 2.59 |
| Tiris-Zemmour | 2.9 | 3.9 | 5.3 | 6.8 | 2.34 |
| Trarza/ Nouakchott | 3.2 | 4.2 | 5.1 | 6.1 | 1.91 |
| Total | 2.2 | 3.0 | 3.8 | 4.6 | 2.09 |
| Inequality | 4.7 | 4.5 | 2.9 | 2.7 | |

Table 4: Mauritania, Regional data for ‘expected years of schooling for children’

| Region | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 | 2018 | 2018/1990 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Adrar | 4.4 | 7.6 | 9.0 | 9.9 | 2.25 |
| Assaba | 3.4 | 5.9 | 6.3 | 7.0 | 2.06 |
| Brakna | 3.1 | 5.4 | 7.9 | 8.8 | 2.84 |
| Gorgol | 2.6 | 4.4 | 5.9 | 6.7 | 2.58 |
| Guidimagha | 2.1 | 3.7 | 6.1 | 7.0 | 3.33 |
| Hodh Charghi | 3.5 | 6.1 | 6.4 | 7.2 | 2.06 |
| Hodh Gharbi | 3.9 | 6.7 | 6.3 | 7.0 | 1.79 |
| Inchiri | 5.5 | 9.5 | 8.2 | 9.0 | 1.64 |
| Nouadhiba | 4.3 | 7.5 | 8.4 | 9.3 | 2.16 |
| Tagant | 3.3 | 5.8 | 7.8 | 8.6 | 2.61 |
| Tiris-Zemmour | 4.7 | 8.2 | 8.6 | 9.5 | 2.02 |
| Trarza/ Nouakchott | 4.6 | 8.0 | 8.9 | 9.8 | 2.13 |
| Total | 3.7 | 6.5 | 7.6 | 8.5 | 2.30 |
| Inequality | 2.6 | 2.6 | 1.5 | 1.5 | |

Table 5: Public Universities, and other tertiary knowledge institutions in Mauritania

| Tertiary institution | Since when | Where |
|----------------------|------------|-------|
|----------------------|------------|-------|

| | | |
|--|---|------------|
| Ecole Nationale d'Administration, de Journalisme et de Magistrature http://enajm.mr | 1966 (2010) | Nouakchott |
| Ecole normale supérieure (ENS) http://www.ens.mr | 1970 (2001) | Nouakchott |
| Université de Nouakchott Al Aasriya http://www.una.mr | 1981; in 2016 merged with University of Science, Technology and Medicine (founded in 2012). | Nouakchott |

Sources: wikipedia, 4icu and WHED (https://www.whed.net/results_institutions.php)

Table 6: Private Universities in Mauritania

| Tertiary institution | Since when | Where |
|---|------------|--|
| Institut Supérieur d'Etudes et de Recherche Islamiques. | 1979 | Nouakchott |
| Sup' Management Mauritanie http://www.supmgtmauritanie.org | 2003 | Nouakchott and Noudhibou; part of Université Intercontinentale Libre (UICL, based in Morocco). |
| Université Libanaise Internationale en Mauritanie http://www.liu.mr | 2008 | Nouakchott (also branches in Lebanon Senegal and Yemen) |

Sources: wikipedia, 4icu and WHED (https://www.whed.net/results_institutions.php)

Table 7 : Think Tanks in Mauritania

| Think Tanks | Where | Website |
|---|------------|---|
| Office National de la Statistique | Nouakchott | www.ons.mr |
| Organization Hope for the Environment | Nouakchott | www.elemel.com |
| Autorité de Régulation | Nouakchott | http://www.are.mr/ |
| Programme des Nations Unies pour le Développement | Nouakchott | http://www.undp.mr/ |
| National Research Center for Agrobusiness | Nouakchott | |

Table 8: Museums in Mauritania

| Museums | Where | Website |
|--|---------------|---------|
| National Museum of Mauritania | Nouakchott | |
| Fort Sagane | Ciudad Valles | |
| Maison des artistes et du savoir M.A.S | Nouakchott | |
| Atlantis Foundation | Chinguetti | |
| Ojo Deld Disierto | Chinguetti | |

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