

Mauritania



Mauritania's natural resources include huge fishery reserves, with more than 700km of coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. Mining, including iron, has always been one of the engines of growth. Fishery products and iron ore have in recent decades represented more than 90 per cent of the total value of Mauritania's exports. In the mid-1990s, fishery products accounted for 56 per cent of total exports, and iron ore 39 per cent. Ten years later, the balance had changed; the share of iron ore increased to 64 per cent and that of fisheries products fell dramatically.

More recently, large deposits of gold, copper and phosphate have been discovered, leading to an unprecedented expansion of foreign direct investment (FDI). Projects have been set up by the Spanish Mauritanian Minerals Company (10 per

cent owned by the Mauritanian government) to mine quartz in the Dhaklet and Inchiri regions. The Indian company Bofal is investing in phosphate in Gorgol and Brakna. And Kinross-Tasiast plans to invest US\$3.7 billion over the period 2012–14 in the gold sector. Following the discovery of large reserves of natural gas in the Banda area, the government has created a company producing electricity from gas, which aims to export electricity to Senegal and Mali.

In view of the strong economic growth since the return to political and institutional stability, the *African Economic Outlook 2013* (AEO), published jointly by the African Development Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, reports indications are that mining and fishing will remain the engines of growth, with a strong

KEY FACTS

Official name: République Islamique Arabe et Africaine de Mauritanie (Islamic Republic of Mauritania)

Head of State: President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz (from 5 Aug 2009)

Head of government: Prime Minister Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf (appointed 14 Aug 2008)

Ruling party: All members of parliament are independents

Area: 1,030,700 square km

Population: 3.63 million (2012)*

Capital: Nouakchott

Official language: Hassani Arabic and Wolof

Currency: Ouguiya (UM) = 5 khoums

Exchange rate: UM300.50 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

GDP per capita: US\$1,157 (2012)*

GDP real growth: 6.36% (2012)*

GDP: US\$4.20 billion (2012)*

Inflation: 4.90% (2012)*

Balance of trade: US\$270.50 million (2011)

* estimated figure

trickle-down effect for other sectors of the economy, including construction, tourism and hospitality, as well as banking and insurance.

Unfortunately, this growth is not accompanied by the significant job creation needed to reduce youth unemployment, the scourge of Mauritania. Indeed, by limiting itself to the export of raw materials instead of processed products, the country generates little added value to its immense riches. The country is failing to develop the small- and medium-sized industries related to the processing industry. Such a policy would strengthen the industrial sector nationally and create local employment opportunities.

However, the low skill level of the local workforce is a real concern for mining operators and public authorities. For Mauritania to get the maximum benefit from its natural resources, beyond its contribution to tax revenue, the country urgently needs to adopt an effective policy of technical and vocational training. This should include proactive measures to support businesses that unemployed young people are culturally reluctant to enter. The social anthropology of the different communities living in Mauritania is based on a stratification of social classes which determines the distribution of tasks, reserving the exercise of manual trades (masonry, carpentry and plumbing) to the disadvantaged and 'slaves'. This popular perception discourages young Mauritians, whether Moors or black Mauritians from seeing training in a trade as their springboard to the future.

Economy

Despite the decline in iron production, the country's main export, as a result of the

slowdown in international demand, the Mauritanian economy showed some resilience with a positive growth rate for the third consecutive year. Although forecast at 4.7 per cent for 2012, growth was in fact a healthy 6 per cent. This performance is due to the recovery of agricultural production following good rainfall, and the dynamism of the construction sector, supported by large public investment and investment by mining companies.

The economic crisis that has shaken European economies has reduced exports of iron sharply. These declined in value by 7.5 per cent in 2012 compared with growth of 47.5 per cent in 2011. The recession has also affected other mineral exports, especially copper (-28.2 per cent) and gold (-9.73 per cent), wiping out the significant recovery in exports of crude oil (29.7 per cent). The agricultural sector recorded growth of 39.6 per cent in 2012 following a decline of 24.3 per cent in 2011 (at constant prices, base 1980) which caused an acute food crisis. The sector benefited from good rainfall and accompanying government measures, such as the distribution of improved seeds and an anti-locust programme co-ordinated with Senegal.

The construction sector, another engine of growth in 2012, has meanwhile maintained its momentum since 2010, with a growth rate of 23.3 per cent in 2012 following rates of 17.6 per cent in 2011 and 10.8 per cent in 2010, (at constant prices, base 1980). This result is supported by an extensive programme of public investment, focused on large projects to improve internal and external access, but also by significant investment in the mining sector.

The good performance of the Mauritanian economy is expected to continue in 2013, with a projected growth rate of 6.4 per cent driven by a recovery in the mining sector, especially gold, and good performance in the construction sector. The mining sector's prospects in 2013 should be assured by the recovery of international demand, the start of production from the Guelbs II project by the national industrial and mining company to increase iron production, and the gradual exploitation of new copper deposits. Construction should remain dynamic, with an increase of nearly 30.0 per cent in the state's capital expenditure and a projected rate of growth in volume of 17.2 per cent in 2013.

In the fisheries sector, the desire to implement the terms of international agreements more fully has led to the recent revocation of license agreements with Chinese companies and major difficulties renewing the fisheries agreement with the European Union (EU). As a result, the projected growth in volume in 2013 is only 5.0 per cent compared with 14.8 per cent in 2012.

All other sectors of the economy should record steady growth, with the exception of retail, catering and hospitality, badly affected by the fall in tourist numbers due to insecurity in the country and the Sahel in general. The crisis in Mali and the French and African military interventions there give the whole region the image of a high-risk area for foreign tourists, especially Westerners.

The main challenge up to 2015, notes the AEO, is therefore to ensure inclusive and sustainable growth. Development of the private sector, and in particular small- and medium-sized enterprises, to diversify the economy and contribute to job creation, is a central concern. Participation of civil society and local communities, sustainable management of natural resources (mining and fishing) are also central to Mauritania's stable medium and long-term development.

Elections

Campaigning for the 23 November 2013 elections got underway on 10 November despite being boycotted by ten of the eleven parties forming the opposition Co-ordination of Democratic Opposition (COD). Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Mohamed Lemine, leader of the ruling Union pour la République (UPR) (Union for the Republic) called on his supporters to give the president a 'comfortable' majority that would enable him to finish his programme of developmental projects for

KEY INDICATORS		Mauritania				
	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	*3.03	*3.11	*3.40	*3.30	*3.63
Gross domestic minus gold	US\$bn	3.20	3.00	3.80	4.20	*4.20
GDP per capita	US\$	1,042	975	1,141	1,247	*1,157
GDP real growth	%	3.5	-1.2	5.1	3.6	*6.4
Inflation	%	7.3	2.2	6.1	5.7	*4.9
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	-	1,364.2	2,073.5	2,765.7	-
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	-	1,390.9	1,935.3	2,495.2	-
Balance of trade	US\$m	-497.0	-26.7	138.2	270.5	-
Current account	US\$m	-497.0	-323.0	-319.1	-313.9	*-1,084.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	188.6	225.4	271.7	288.2	*949.5
Foreign exchange	US\$m	188.5	225.2	271.6	287.5	*946.0
Exchange rate	per US\$	258.58	262.36	275.89	278.30	300.44
* estimated figure						

the good of all citizens. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported that 438 people had registered to contest the 147 seats in parliament.

Completion of the biometric population census has supposedly (the opposition do not think so) provided the country with a reliable electoral register. However, registrations sparked violence in Negro-Mauritanian majority areas, denouncing its 'discriminatory character'. 1.2 million voters are eligible to vote during the elections.

The Islamist threat linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is felt even in the capital. The crisis in the north of Mali and the influx of refugees may have a negative impact on the Mauritania as well.

Risk assessment

Politics	Poor
Economy	Poor
Regional stability	Poor

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1800s France took control first of southern Mauritania, ruling it from Senegal.
 1904 Mauritania became a colonial territory of France.
 1920 Mauritania became part of French West Africa.
 1946 Mauritania became a Territoire d'Outre-Mer (TOM, overseas territory) of France.
 1957 Limited self-government was granted under the Loi cadre. Nouakchott became the capital.
 1960 Mauritania gained full independence from France on 28 November, under the regime of the Mauritanian People's Party. Mokhtar Ould Daddah became president.
 1974 Mauritania withdrew from the CFA currency zone and introduced the ouguiya.
 1975 An agreement between Mauritania, Morocco and Spain led to the division of the Spanish Sahara (a Spanish colony and the present-day Sahrawi Arab Republic (Western Sahara)) between Mauritania and Morocco.
 1978 After fighting a largely unsuccessful war against the Frente para la Liberación de Saguia al Hamra y Río de Oro (Frente Polisario) (Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia al Hamra and Río de Oro) rebels of the Western Sahara, President Daddah was overthrown.
 1979 The government of President Haidallah agreed to renounce all territorial claims to Western Sahara.
 1981 Slavery was banned in Mauritania.

1984 Haidallah was removed from office by Colonel Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya.

1992 Multi-party elections were held in which President Taya was returned to office.

1996 The governing Parti Républicain Démocratique et Social (PRDS) (Social and Democratic Republican Party) won the elections.

1997 President Taya was re-elected.

1999 Full diplomatic relations were established with Israel. After criticism by Iraq, the foreign ministry announced that Mauritania had severed its relations with Iraq.

2001 The PRDS was re-elected.

2002 Famine increased due to three years of drought.

2003 The OPEC Fund for International Development donated US\$300,000 to support an emergency operation by the World Food Programme (WFP). A coup attempt by rebels in Nouakchott was foiled by the President's troops. President Taya named Sghair Ould M'Bareck as the new prime minister. Incumbent Maaouya Ould Sid'Ahmed Taya was re-elected president. Prime Minister Sghair Ould M'Bareck was re-appointed.

2005 Mauritania lost its annual crop production after it was attacked by locust swarms. The UN called for food aid.

While President Taya was out of the country, a military coup overthrew his regime. Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall (leader of the military *Junta*) was declared president and head of the Military Council for Justice and Democracy.

2006 A referendum was held approving limitations on future presidential powers. Parliamentary and municipal elections took place.

2007 Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi won presidential elections and Zeine Ould Zeidane became prime minister.

2008 Prime Minister Zeine Ould Zeidane resigned and was replaced by Yahya Ould Ahmed El Waghef. A *coup d'état* led by General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz removed President Abdallahi and Prime Minister El Waghef from power. Within a week, two-thirds of members of parliament had signed a document in support of the coup. A High Council of State was established, led by General Abdel Aziz. Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf was appointed prime minister. Former prime minister El Waghef was arrested, released and then rearrested a few days later and put on trial for malfeasance and later corruption.

2009 General Abdel Aziz resigned as president and chairman of the ruling High Council of State and Ba Mamadou dit M'Baré became interim president. The

opposition agreed to participate in presidential elections on the condition that former prime minister El Waghef was released from gaol. Presidential elections were postponed but later Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz (Union pour la République (UPR) (Union for the Republic)) won 52.58 per cent of the vote, his closest rival Messaoud Ould Boulkheir (APP) won 16.29 per cent. A unity government, headed by President Aziz, was formed to include opposition members.

2010 A *fatwa* (religious opinion), banning the practice of female genital mutilation was signed by 34 Islamic scholars. A UN-sponsored repatriation scheme for Mauritanian refugees in Senegal resumed.

2011 In June and July, there were a number of skirmishes between government troops and fighters of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The numbers wounded or killed varied according to sources. A national census was undertaken from 20 June, which sparked protests from the black African community in Mauritania and abroad. The census was branded as 'discriminatory' as it not only noted citizens within racial groupings (which, it was suspected, could be used to discriminate against various groupings in the future), but required a set of civil documents (including identity papers of parents and grandparents, which excluded anyone born outside Mauritania before 1945), before a person could be recorded (or 'enrolled').

2012 A Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali caused thousands of Malian refugees to flee into Mauritania. On 13 October, President Aziz was wounded when soldiers opened fire on his convoy. The president was flown to France for treatment. He returned home from France on 24 November.

2013 In May a deal to allow EU vessels to fish in Mauritanian waters in exchange for a €70 million (US\$93 million) financial package was rejected by the Fisheries Committee as being a 'bad deal for taxpayers'. An alternative agreement is expected to be put forward later in the year. Heavy rainfall that began in August had by September flooded much of Nouakchott, and six of the surrounding regions. In the south-central region as many as 40 per cent of families had been affected, while in the north herders in some regions had lost complete herds.

Political structure

Constitution

A new constitution was approved in 2006; a president is limited to two consecutive terms in office, which are cut from six to five years and there is a presidential age

limit of 75 years. The oath of office includes a vow not to alter these changes.

Form of state

Islamic republic

The executive

The president is the head of state and is elected by universal suffrage for five-year terms. The president appoints the prime minister and presides over the Council of Ministers, who are recommended by the prime minister and appointed by the president. The president is the supreme chief of the armed forces.

The president, after consultation with the prime minister and the presidents of the assemblies, may pronounce the dissolution of the National Assembly.

National legislature

The bicameral *Barlamane* (parliament) is comprised of the *Al Jamiya al Wataniyah* (National Assembly), with 81 members, directly elected in single-seat constituencies for five-year terms and the *Majlis al Shuyukh* (Senate) with 56 members, of which 53 are elected by municipal councils for six-year terms. Three members are elected by expatriated Mauritians. An alternate one-third of senators are re-elected every two years.

The prime minister, under the authority of the president, defines the policy of the government, divides the tasks among the ministers and directs and co-ordinates the action of the government.

Legal system

The legal system is based on the 1991 constitution and is strongly influenced by *Sharia* (Islamic law).

Last elections

18 July 2009 (presidential); 19 November/3 December 2006 (parliamentary)

Results: Presidential: Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz (Union pour la République (UPR) (Union for the Republic)) won 52.58 per cent of the vote, Messaoud Ould Boulkheir (APP) 16.29 per cent, Ahmed Ould Daddah (RFD) 13.66 per cent; seven other candidates won less than 5 per cent of the vote.

Parliamentary: Regroupement des Forces Démocratiques (RFD) (Rally of Democratic Forces) won 15 out of 95 seats; Union des Forces du Progrès (UFP) (Union of Forces for Progress) won eight seats; Parti Republicain Démocratique et Renouveau (PRDR) (Republican Party for Democracy and Renewal) seven seats; other parties, including Alliance Populaire pour le Progrès (APP) (Alliance for Popular Progress) 24 seats, and independents 41 seats.

Next elections

23 November 2013 and 7 December (parliamentary), 2014 (presidential)

Political parties

Political parties were legalised in July 1991 but were forbidden to be organised on racial or regional lines, or to be opposed to Islam.

Ruling party

All members of parliament are independents

Population

3.63 million (2012)*

Last census: November 2000:

2,548,157

Population density: Two inhabitants per square km. Urban population 41 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 2.8 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

The population comprises a majority of Arabised Moors. The rest are ethnically linked with the peoples of Senegal and Mali. Moor-black (40 per cent), Moor (30 per cent), black (30 per cent).

Religions

Islam (99 per cent) is the state religion.

Education

Primary schooling lasts for six years. Progression to secondary education is through a competitive entrance examination. Secondary schooling lasts for six years, divided into two three-year cycles. Each stage requires further examination and students may graduate from either with academic or technical qualifications. Public expenditure on education typically amounts to around 5 per cent of gross national income (GNI).

Literacy rate: 41 per cent adult rate; 50 per cent youth rate (15–24) (Unesco 2005).

Compulsory years: Six to 16.

Enrolment rate: 87 per cent (boys); 82 per cent (girls) gross primary enrolment of the relevant age group (including repeaters), (Unicef).

Pupils per teacher: 50 in primary schools.

Health

Improved water sources and sanitation facilities are available to 37 per cent and 33 per cent of the population, respectively.

HIV/Aids

HIV prevalence: 0.6 per cent aged 15–49 in 2003 (World Bank)

Life expectancy: 58 years, 2004 (WHO 2006)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 4.5 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef)

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 84 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012); 32 per cent of children aged under five are malnourished (World Bank).

Head of population per physician: 0.11 physicians per 1,000 people, 2004 (WHO 2006)

Main cities

Nouakchott (administrative capital, estimated population 870,073 in 2012), Kifah (91,336), Nouadhibou (formerly Port-Etienne, 85,337), Rosso (80,936), Kayhaydi (59,942), Zuwarat (56,851).

Languages spoken

French is usually spoken in business circles; English is rarely spoken. Hassani Arabic, Pulaar, Soninke and Wolof are the major languages in everyday use.

Official language/s

Hassani Arabic and Wolof

Media

Since 2006 freedom of the press has been generally respected by two revolutionary regimes and has been described as 'partly free' by US-based human rights watchdog, Freedom House. Nevertheless, journalists are prohibited from publishing material that is anti-Islamic or threatens national security.

Press

There are three daily newspapers published by the state, two in Arabic *Chaab* (www.ami.mr/chaab) and *Akhbar Nouakchott* (www.ani.mr/anifr.php) and one in French, *Horizons* (www.ami.mr/horizons). Private dailies include, in French *Le Calame* (www.lecalame.info), *Le Quotidien de Nouakchott* (www.quotidien-nouakchott.com) and *Al Mourabit* (www.almourabit.mr); in Arabic *El Bedil Athalith*.

Broadcasting

The government operates the only national public broadcaster, operating Radio Mauritanie and Télévision de Mauritanie (TVM) (www.tvm.mr), which broadcast in Arabic and French.

National news agency: Mauritanian News Agency (in Arabic): www.ami.mr

Other news agencies: APA (African Press Agency): www.apanews.net

Economy

The service sector accounted for 42.8 per cent of GDP in 2010, industry constituted 37.0 per cent of which manufacturing amounted to 4.0 per cent and agriculture contributed 20.2 per cent of GDP. Mauritania has valuable deposits of iron ore, gold and copper, which combined account for over 50 per cent of total export earnings. Iron ore contributes some 40 per cent of total exports, and iron ore constitutes around 15 per cent of GDP. The trade balance in 2009 was -US\$26.7 million, which turned around in 2010 with a balance of US\$81.3 million (2.3 per cent of GDP). Foreign earnings also come from fish caught within Mauritania's territorial waters by licensed foreign vessels.

Mauritania has been warned that its seas will become over-fished without strict monitoring.

Around 50 per cent of the population depend on agriculture (typically subsistence farming) for a livelihood; a series of droughts since the 1980s have forced nomads and subsistence farmers into urban areas.

GDP growth was 3.5 per cent in 2008, but as the global economic crisis deepened in 2008 it cut world trade and iron ore exports dropped from US\$828.4 million in 2008 to US\$521.6 million in 2009. As a result the economy fell into recession with GDP growth of -1.2 per cent. However as global trade picked up, GDP growth surged back to 5.1 per cent in 2010, before weakening to an estimated 3.6 per cent in 2011.

Proven and probable oil reserves were estimated at 600 million barrels in 2011. Although Mauritania began producing oil in 2006 with an initial production of 75,000 barrels per day (bpd), this rapidly dropped to 30,000bpd by the end of the year, largely due to technical difficulties offshore in the Chinguetti oil field. Following challenges to the legality of the initial developer to drill for this oil, the Chinguetti oil field was sold to the Malaysian state-owned energy company, Petronas in 2007. Since then, the project has not lived up to expectations and in September 2011, Petronas forecast that output would increase from 4,000bpd to 8,000bpd by the end of 2011.

Mauritania joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) – a forum of oil producers and consumers seeking to promote accountability in oil revenue – as part of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sponsored growth programme in 2005 (full validation of EITI compliance will be in 2017). The IMF advised that oil funds should be used in accordance with Mauritania's own poverty reduction strategy plans, with a fund for investment in future generations.

In 2011, the UN Human Development Index (HDI) ranked Mauritania 159 (out of 187) for national development in health, education and income. Since 2000, Mauritania's progress has matched the improvement of other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2010, 57.1 per cent of the population experienced at least one indicator of poverty, while 21.2 per cent lived on less than the equivalent of US\$1.25 per day; the headcount poverty rate was 61.7 per cent of the population (2000–10).

External trade

Mauritania is a member of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) (with Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya); however no

economic integration or free trade agreement has been achieved between members.

Exports of crude oil averaged only 17,000 barrels per day in 2007, earning US\$310 million. An agreement was signed with the European Union (EU) to allow EU fishing fleets access to Mauritanian waters for €516 million (US\$700 million) over 2006–12.

Imports

Principal imports are capital machinery and equipment, petroleum products, vehicles, foodstuffs and consumer goods.

Main sources: UAE (25.9 per cent of total in 2011), Belgium (14 per cent), France (12.2 per cent).

Exports

Principal exports are fish and fish products, crude oil, iron ore and gold.

Main destinations: China (36.9 per cent of total in 2011), Switzerland (13.6 per cent), Italy (10 per cent).

Agriculture

Production of food crops is restricted to irrigated land in the south along the north bank of the Senegal River. International aid and imported cereals have been vital in supplementing the main food crops – millet, sorghum, rice, maize, potatoes and dates.

Most of Mauritania consists of arid and semi-arid land and although it is unsuitable for crops, livestock rearing is an important sector. Nomadic herders comprise around 10 per cent of the population, although their numbers are dwindling. In 2005 Oxfam stated intermittent droughts since 2000 have affected nomadic herders and northern farming families, leading to food crises and a need of food and farming aid.

Fishing contributes up to 10 per cent of GDP and provides around 45 per cent of export earnings as well as being an important source of food for Mauritians. The coastal waters are among the richest in the world and joint venture fishing is one of the most important foreign exchange earners. The catch is mainly deep sea species and shellfish – particularly shrimp for the Japanese market.

The majority of timber production is used as domestic firewood.

Industry and manufacturing

The industrial sector contributes around 10 per cent to GDP and employs 5 per cent of the workforce.

The most important activities are fish freezing and processing and the treatment of locally mined iron ore. There are also various small import substitution industries (brewing, footwear, dairy processing etc), oil refining and a sugar refinery in Nouakchott.

Industrial production increased by 2 per cent in 2003.

Tourism

Mauritania has some ancient cities that have cultural and spiritual significance for both citizens and visitors to the country.

The city of Chinguetti was a famous centre of Koranic education that was renowned throughout the region and reached its height of fame during the 17th and 18th centuries. Today it is largely a city buried by the Sahara but some of the old city buildings remain. The trans-Saharan caravans were frequent visitor and towns that grew up along the trade routes can still be visited, including Ouadane, which is included on Unesco's World Heritage List, as part of the world inheritance to humanity.

Western governments have warned their citizens not to visit most of the country, including the historic towns and cities of central, eastern, northern and north-western Mauritania due to the high danger of kidnapping by lawless elements and terrorists. The south and south-west of the country are deemed merely unsafe.

Environment

In June 2010 the African Union backed a proposal to build the 'Great Green Wall' project, of a 15km wide, 7,775km long, continuous belt of trees from Senegal in the west to Djibouti in the east (traversing 11 countries) in an effort to halt the advance of the Sahara Desert. The trees to be used would be drought-adapted, preferably native to the area from a list of 37 possible species, and should help to slow soil erosion and filter rain water.

Mining

The mining sector contributes around 13 per cent to GDP, employs 5 per cent of the working population and generates 42 per cent of export earnings.

The annual output of iron ore is around 12 million tonnes, of which about 11 million tonnes is exported – 36 per cent to France, 26 per cent to Italy, 16 per cent to Belgium, 8 per cent to Germany, 4 per cent to Spain and 4 per cent to the UK. The iron mines are located in the Tiris region in the north and are owned and operated by Société Nationale Industrielle et Minière (SNIM). Other mineral resources include copper (at Akjouit); gold (also near Akjouit); phosphates (deposits at Bofal), diamonds and uranium.

Hydrocarbons

Proven oil reserves were 100 million barrels in 2008, with production at 12,830 barrels per day (bpd). Consumption was 21,000bpd with the shortfall covered by imports. Oil production began in 2006 from the small offshore Chinguetti oil field; the Tiof oil field, which is not under

production, has reserves estimated at 350 million barrels. Exploration of offshore sites is ongoing.

The Société Mauritanienne des Hydrocarbures (SMH) is responsible for all matters dealing with exploration, production and marketing of oil and gas in Mauritania, with exclusive rights to negotiate on behalf of the state any exploitation of the country's hydrocarbon resources. The Somir oil refinery in Nouadhibou, is the only refinery in operation. Owned by an Algerian company, it processes Algerian crude oil, with a capacity of 20,000bpd.

Proven natural gas reserves were 28.3 billion cubic metres (cum) in 2008, but production remains negligible. In January 2009 the government signed an agreement with Shell Gas and Power to evaluate the potential for developing the natural gas reserves.

Any imports of coal are insignificant and reserves are negligible.

Energy

Total installed generating capacity was 180MW in 2007, producing 410 million kilowatt hours (kWh). Hydropower accounts for around 50MW of primary energy; Mauritania receives around 30MW from the Manantali hydroelectric dam in Mali.

The Société Mauritanienne d'Electricité (Maurelec) is responsible for electricity generation, transmission and supply. The electricity network serves only a few people in urban areas. There is small-scale thermal electricity (generating capacity 110MW), most of which is provided by isolated diesel generators. The majority of the population relies on non-commercial biomass, mostly fuel wood for cooking, lighting and power.

Banking and insurance

In recent years, Mauritania's banking sector has undergone liberalisation with the government selling its equity stake in commercial banks, making the sector more competitive. Reform of the banking sector has led to limits on bank lending and to new laws on debt recovery.

Domestic confidence in the banking sector remains low and 60 per cent of cash is still not placed in banks. However, this represents an enormous opportunity for the banking sector to increase savings and improve liquidity. An increase in the number of bank branches and the introduction of micro-banking schemes may transform the sector in coming years.

Central bank

Banque Centrale de Mauritanie

Main financial centre

Nouakchott

Time

GMT

Geography

Mauritania lies in north-west Africa, with the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Algeria and Western Sahara/Morocco to the north, Mali to the east and south, and Senegal to the south.

Mauritania extends over an area of 1,030,700 square km, around 75 per cent of which is covered with sand and scrub. South-west-facing scarps in the huge plains are home to oases. The general flatness is relieved by rocky plateaux, which rise to 500–600m. These are cut by ravines and punctuated by isolated peaks. The country's highest point is Kediet Ijill, which reaches 915m. The plateaux drop gradually north-eastwards to the Empty Quarter, heralding the onset of the Sahara. Westwards, between the plateaux and the Atlantic Ocean, the terrain alternates between areas of plains and dunes, which increase in size and movement to the north. The only area of permanent vegetation is in the south along the Senegal river, which forms the frontier with Senegal.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

The climate is hot and dry. The hottest month in Nouakchott is September (24–34 degrees Celsius (C)); the coldest is December (12–29 degrees C); the wettest month is August.

Entry requirements

Passports

Required by all.

Visa

Required by all, except citizens of neighbouring states, contact the consular section of the nearest embassy for confirmation of exclusions. Business travellers may visit with a tourist visa, obtained in advance. An application should include a bank letter showing sufficient funds for the length of trip, an employer's letter of accreditation and an invitation from a local company or organisation. All travellers must have return/onward passage.

Currency advice/regulations

Unlimited foreign currency may be imported, but the amount must be declared on arrival. Unexchanged foreign currency may be exported. Declaration forms must be produced on departure. Import and export of local currency is strictly forbidden. Controls are constantly subject to modification.

Health (for visitors)

Mandatory precautions

Yellow fever vaccination certificate required if arriving from an infected area.

Advisable precautions

Yellow fever, hepatitis A, tetanus, typhoid and polio vaccinations. Malaria prophylaxis should be taken.

Water precautions are advisable. There is a rabies risk.

Hotels

Accommodation is limited and visitors should book well in advance. A service charge is normally included in the bill, otherwise a 15 per cent tip is usual.

Credit cards

Only accepted in main hotels.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 25 May (Africa Day), 10 Jul (Armed Forces Day), 28 Nov (Independence Day).

Variable dates

Eid al Adha, Islamic New Year, Birth of the Prophet, Eid al Fitr.

Islamic year 1435 (5 Nov 2013–24 Oct 2014):

The Islamic year contains 354 or 355 days, with the result that Muslim feasts advance by 10–12 days against the Gregorian calendar. Dates of feasts vary according to the sighting of the new moon, so cannot be forecast exactly.

Working hours

Banking

Sun–Wed: 0800–1115; 1430–1630;
Thu: 0800–1500.

Business

Sat–Wed: 0800–1500; Thu: 0800–1300. Some stop for a lunch-time break (usually 1200–1300 or 1500).

Government

Sat–Wed: 0800–1500; Thu: 0800–1300.

Shops

Sat–Thu: 0800–1200; 1430–1800.

Telecommunications

Telephone/fax

International telephone facilities are available in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

Electricity supply

127/220V AC, 50 cycles. Plugs and sockets mostly two-pin (round).

Getting there

Air

National airline: Air Mauritanie

International airport/s: Nouakchott (NKC), 4km from city; Nouadhibou (NDB), 4km from city.

Airport tax: UM270.

Surface

Road: Crossing the Mali and Western Sahara/Morocco borders may present difficulties and the Algerian frontier is closed. The best route is via Senegal. A surfaced road exists from Dakar (Senegal) to Nouakchott.

Main port/s: Nouadhibou and Nouakchott

Getting about**National transport**

Air: Air Mauritanie provides mainly weekly services between most main centres.

Road: Most roads linking major centres are adequate, although four-wheel drive vehicles are recommended. Minor roads are usually impassable after the rainy season. There is a paved road between Rosso (on the Senegal River, where a ferry connects with the road to Dakar) and Akjoujt, via Nouakchott, and another, *La Route de l'Espoir*, running from Nouakchott to Mali.

Rail: A track runs inland from the coast (Nouakchott-Zouerate), mainly for freight, but there are some passenger services (single-class) scheduled; motor vehicles are sometimes carried.

City transport

Taxis: Taxis are numerous in the main towns. They are not metered, but the fares are standardised, although they should be checked before departure. A small tip is usual. Taxis can be rented by the hour.

Car hire

Cars can be rented in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Atar. An international or national driving licence is required. Out of town, a four-wheel drive vehicle with chauffeur, although expensive, is recommended.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The international dialling (IDD) code for Mauritania is +222, followed by subscriber's number.

Chambers of Commerce

Mauritania Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, Avenue de la République, PO Box 215, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2214; fax: 525-3895; e-mail: ccia@mauritel.mr).

Banking

Banque Mauritanienne pour le Commerce International, PO Box 622, Immeuble Afarco, Avenue Gamal Abdel

Nasser, Nouakchott (tel: 525-4349; fax: 525-2045).

Banque Nationale de Mauritanie; PO Box 614, Avenue Gamal Abdel Nasser, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2602; fax: 525-3397).

Central bank

Banque Centrale de Mauritanie, PO Box 623, Avenue de l'Indépendance, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2206; fax: 525-2759; e-mail: info@bcm.mr).

Travel information

Air Mauritanie, Avenue Gamal Abdel Nasser, PO Box 41, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2721; e-mail: resa@airmauritanie.mr).

Ministry of tourism

Ministry of Trade, Handicrafts and Tourism, Directorate of Tourism, PO Box 246, Nouakchott (tel: 525-1367; fax: 525-1057).

National tourist organisation offices

Office National du Tourisme, PO Box 2884, Nouakchott (tel: 529-0344; fax: 529-0528; e-mail: ont@mauritel.mr).

Ministries

Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development, BP 238, Nouakchott (tel: 525-1612; fax: 525-5110; e-mail: infomaed@mauritania.mr).

Ministry of Education, PO Box 227, Nouakchott (tel: 525-8445; fax: 525-1222).

Ministry of Finance, PO Box 197, Nouakchott (tel: 525-4397; fax: 525-3114; e-mail: sidahd@mauritania.mr).

Ministry of Fishing and Maritime Economy, PO Box 137, Nouakchott (tel: 525-9970; fax: 525-3146).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, PO Box 230, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2682).

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, PO Box 169, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2052).

Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, PO Box 237, Nouakchott (tel: 525-3337).

Ministry of the Interior, Post and Telecommunications, PO Box 195, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2020).

Ministry of Mines and Industry, PO Box 199, Nouakchott (tel: 525-3086; fax: 525-6937; e-mail: mmi@mauritania.mr).

Ministry of Trade, Artisans and Tourism, PO Box 182, Nouakchott (tel: 525-1057).

Ministry of Rural Development and Environment, PO Box 366, Nouakchott (tel: 525-1500; fax: 525-7574).

Prime Minister's Office, PO Box 237, Nouakchott (tel: 525-3337).

Other useful addresses

Centre d'Information Mauritanien pour le Développement Economique et Technique, PO Box 2119, Nouakchott (tel: 525-8738; fax: 525-8648; e-mail: cimdet@pacdet.org).

Confédération Générale des Employeurs de Mauritanie (CGEM), PO Box 383, Nouakchott (tel: 525-2160; fax: 525-3301).

Fédération des Industries et Armement de Pêche (FIAP), PO Box 43, Nouadhibou (tel: 574-5089; fax: 574-5430).

Fédération des Industries et des Mines (FIM), PO Box 5501, Nouakchott (tel: 525-0304; fax: 525-6955).

Mauritanian Embassy (USA), 2129 Leroy Place, NW, Washington DC 20008 (tel: (+1-202)-232-5700; fax: (+1-202)-319-2623).

Mauritanienne d'Entreposage des Produits Pétroliers (MEPP), Nouakchott (tel: 525-2646; fax: 525-4608; e-mail: mepp@mauritel.mr).

National Statistics Office, BP 240, Nouakchott (tel: 525-5031; fax: 525-5170; e-mail: webmaster@ons.mr).

National news agency: Mauritanian News Agency (in Arabic): www.ami.mr

Other news agencies: APA (African Press Agency): www.apanews.net

Internet sites

Africa Business Network:
<http://www.ifc.org/abn>

AllAfrica.com: <http://allafrica.com>

African Development Bank:
<http://www.afdb.org>

Africa Online:
<http://www.africaonline.com>