

In 2015, Mauritania made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government amended the Anti-Slavery Law to increase the penalties for slavery offenses and criminalize other slavery-like practices, including debt bondage. The Government also adopted the National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor, which aims to strengthen child labor laws and mobilize funds for social programs to withdraw children from child labor. In addition, the Government funded and participated in multiple programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms. However, children in Mauritania are engaged in child labor, including in herding cattle and goats, and in the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary slavery. Mauritania's legal framework does not prohibit hazardous occupations and activities in all relevant child labor sectors, including agriculture; it also does not prohibit children from being used, procured, or offered for the production and trafficking of drugs. Limited resources for the systematic enforcement of child labor laws impede government efforts to protect children from the worst forms of child labor. Additionally, the Government continued to imprison anti-slavery protestors.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Mauritania are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and particularly in herding cattle and goats.(1-6) Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary slavery.(5-11) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Mauritania.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5-14 yrs.	18.2 (172,936)
Attending School (%)	5-14 yrs.	48.6
Combining Work and School (%)	7-14 yrs.	10.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		67.5

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2014, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(12)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3, 2007.(13)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Production of beans,* rice,* millet,* sorghum,* and vegetables* (2, 14-16)
	Herding and caring for cattle, goats, sheep,*and camels* (1-3, 5, 6, 11)
	Capturing and processing fish* (2, 5, 6, 14, 15, 17)
Industry	Crushing gravel* (6, 17, 18)
Services	Domestic work† (3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 19)
	Working as car mechanics and painters (2, 5, 14-17, 20)
	Garbage scavenging (5, 14-17)
	Street work, including as market vendors, shoe shiners,* beggars,† and in the transportation sector* (1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 15, 17, 21, 22)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced begging as a result of criminal gang recruitment and by Koranic teachers (3, 5, 6, 8, 15)
	Commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (6, 8, 9, 14, 17)
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (2, 14, 15, 23)
	Indentured and hereditary slavery (2, 5-7, 9-11)
	Forced labor in domestic work and camel jockeying, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1, 6, 8, 14, 18, 24)

* Evidence of this activity is limited and/or the extent of the problem is unknown.

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Children in Mauritania continue to be exploited as slaves and endure slave-like practices in remote areas of the country. Some children are born into slavery, while others are forced to work the land and turn over what they produce to their masters in order to remain on the land.(2, 5, 7-11, 25) Some child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor.(1-3, 6, 9) Some former slaves, commonly descendants of slaves from the Haratin ethnic minority, continue to endure slave-like practices, including working for their former masters in exchange for food, money, and lodging.(2, 6, 7, 9, 11, 26)

In Mauritania, it is a traditional practice to send children to Koranic teachers to receive an education. However, some Koranic teachers (*marabouts*) force their students (*talibés*) to beg on the streets for long hours and to surrender the money they have earned, or to perform manual labor.(2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 18, 25)




Although the Constitution makes primary education compulsory, in practice, this provision is not enforced effectively, as many children do not attend school. The lack of school infrastructure and limited availability of teachers, especially in rural areas, impede access to education, which may increase the vulnerability of children to the worst forms of child labor.(2, 10, 27-29) Many children in Mauritania are not registered at birth. Unable to prove their citizenship, unregistered children have difficulties accessing services such as education.(8, 25, 26, 30, 31) Although birth certificates are not required for children to enroll in primary school, birth certificates are required for children to sit and take national standardized examinations to graduate. (32)

In 2015, Mauritania hosted approximately 50,100 Malian refugees.(33) Refugee children may have difficulty accessing education, which could put them at increased risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labor.(10, 33, 34) In addition, children from families of slave descent face barriers to accessing education due to societal discrimination.(2, 11, 26)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Mauritania has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4).

Table 4. Laws and Regulations Related to Child Labor

Standard	Yes/No	Age	Related Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	14	Article 153 of the Labor Code (35)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 247 of the Labor Code (35)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Article 2 of Law No. 1797; Article 42 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (36, 37)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Law 052/15; Articles 1 and 3-4 of Law 025/2003; Article 1 of Law 2013-011 (38-40)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 1 and 3 of Law 025/2003 (38)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Article 1 of Law 025/2003; Articles 24- 26 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (37, 38)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		
Minimum Age for Compulsory Military Recruitment	N/A*		
Minimum Age for Voluntary Military Service	Yes	18	Article 7 of Law 62132/1962 (41, 42)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (27, 28)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (27)

* No conscription (42)

In August 2015, the Government amended the Anti-Slavery Law to criminalize additional slavery-like practices, including debt bondage, and to increase the penalties against those convicted of slavery up to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine up to \$16,000.(9, 40, 43, 44) The amendment also called for the creation of special tribunals to prosecute crimes related to slavery and entitled victims, including children, to legal aid and free legal proceedings. In addition, the amendment allowed civil society organizations that have been legally registered for five years to file complaints on behalf of victims of slavery and slavery-like practices.(9, 40, 44)

The Labor Code allows children between ages 12 and 14 to perform light work, as long as it does not impede their school attendance or exceed two hours of work per day, and if it is authorized by the Ministry of Labor.(35) However, the Labor Code does not determine the activities in which light work may be permitted.(2, 45) Children working in unpaid, temporary, or non-contractual work do not have the same protections under the child labor laws and regulations as do children working in contractual employment.(35, 46, 47) In addition, the penalties established for violating child labor laws are insufficient and do not generally deter violations.(2, 6, 48)

While Mauritanian law prohibits the use of children in some illicit activities, such as organized begging, it does not criminally prohibit the use, procuring, or offering of a child for the production or trafficking of drugs. (23, 29) The law prohibits hazardous occupations and activities for children, but it does not cover agriculture, a sector of work in which there is evidence that children use dangerous equipment and are exposed to hazardous substances.(4, 6) In 2011, the Government, in partnership with local NGOs, UNICEF, and Terre des Hommes, drafted a law against the worst forms of child labor, which includes a more specific list of hazardous occupations for children, including prohibitions on work in agriculture; however, the Government has not enacted this legislation.(6, 49, 50)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 5).

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor Office of Labor and Inspection	Receive and investigate labor complaints.(2, 51)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of the Interior Special Brigade for Minors	Investigate crimes against children, including human trafficking, and monitor religious schools, or mahadras, to ensure that children are not forced to beg on behalf of their teachers. Operates in Nouakchott.(2, 52, 53)
National Police	Investigate crimes against children.(53)
Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF) Office of Childhood	Develop and implement programs to protect vulnerable children and monitor alleged violations of child labor laws, including those related to the worst forms of child labor. Manages the Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations.(2, 8, 51)
Ministry of Justice Direction of the Judiciary for Protection of Children	Coordinate child protection issues and oversee the Special Brigade for Minors and tribunals that sentence child offenders.(2, 53)
National Commission for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action	Advocate for the eradication of slavery and receive complaints and conduct investigations on human rights violations, including the worst forms of child labor.(10, 31, 54)
National Agency for the Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty (Tadamoun)	Develop and implement programs to tackle poverty, promote the integration of refugees, and rehabilitate former slaves.(7, 31, 55) File complaints on behalf of citizens who accuse their employers of practicing slavery and bring cases of alleged slavery to the authorities for investigation.(8, 31, 54)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2015, labor law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms (Table 6).

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$33,300 (18, 32)	\$33,300 (6, 56)
Number of Labor Inspectors	72 (57)	67 (6, 32)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (18)	No (6, 56)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (48)	Yes (48)
■ Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (6)	N/A (6)
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (18)	Yes (48)
Number of Labor Inspections	Unknown (18)	Unknown (48)
■ Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (18)	Unknown (48)
■ Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown (18)	Unknown (48)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (18)	Unknown (48)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (18)	Unknown (48)
■ Number of Penalties Imposed That Were Collected	Unknown (18)	Unknown (48)
Routine Inspections Conducted	No (6)	No (6)
■ Routine Inspections Targeted	No (6)	No (6)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (48)	Yes (48)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (48)	Yes (48)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (32)	Yes (32)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (18, 32)	Yes (6, 32)

During the reporting period, the Government budgeted \$582,000 to the Office of Childhood at the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family to support activities to end child labor. However, the Government considers this amount inadequate and no specific amount was allotted to conduct inspections.(6) In 2015, the Ministry of Labor employed 47 full-time labor inspectors and 20 full-time labor controllers. However, labor inspectors and labor controllers conduct inspections only when complaints are lodged to the Ministry of Labor.(6, 58)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2015, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to combat the worst forms of child labor (Table 7).

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2014	2015
Training for Investigators		
■ Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (48)	Yes (48)
■ Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (48)	No (6)
■ Refresher Courses Provided	Unknown (48)	Yes (48)
Number of Investigations	4,167 (6)	4,200 (32)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (48)	Unknown (6)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (48)	Unknown (48)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (48)	Unknown (48)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (18)	Yes (48)

In 2015, the Special Brigade for Minors employed 10 officers and investigated 600 cases.(6, 18) However, research could not determine how many of the cases involved child labor.(6) In addition, the Special Brigade for Minors referred 373 children who were victims of exploitation, violence, or neglect to social welfare services. The Special Brigade for Minors also referred 1,100 children for monitoring.(43) However, police generally lacked resources, which stymied investigation of cases, including those involving the worst forms of child labor.(43, 59, 60)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group	Coordinate child labor and child trafficking efforts. Comprised of MASEF Office of Childhood; Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Justice Direction of Child Judiciary Protection; and the National Commission for Human Rights and Humanitarian Action. Also includes international organizations and NGOs.(51, 61)
National Council for Children	Coordinate and monitor government efforts on child protection and development.(49) Chaired by the Office of the Prime Minister and comprised of officials from MASEF and the Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, and Social Security. Also includes nongovernmental stakeholders such as international organizations, NGOs, and social partners.(62)

The Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group and the National Council for Children were inactive during the reporting period and did not receive any funding.(48, 49, 63)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

The Government of Mauritania has established policies related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 9).

Table 9. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor (2015–2020)†	Aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by strengthening child labor laws, training relevant government officials on combating the worst forms of child labor, implementing awareness-raising campaigns, and mobilizing funds for social programs to withdraw children from child labor.(5, 6)
National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery (2014–2017)	Aims to prevent slavery through improvements in education, health, and by providing victims with income-generating activities. Falls under the direction of the National Agency for the Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty (Tadamoun).(32, 64, 65)
Roadmap for the Eradication of the Vestiges of Slavery (2014–2016)	Calls for an awareness-raising campaign on slavery, the revision of slavery laws and policies, the implementation of programs that provide former slaves with access to education and livelihood opportunities, and provide assistance to former slaves who wish to return to their home countries. (66–68) Based on 29 of 42 recommendations made by the UN’s Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery after an official mission to Mauritania.(64–67)
Strategic Framework to Fight Poverty (2011–2015)	Sought to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, provide quality education to vulnerable children, and protect the rights of children.(69)
Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II (2011–2015)	Sought to eliminate child labor and included plans to increase access to high-quality education for all children.(18, 70, 71)

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Table 9. Policies Related to Child Labor (cont)

Policy	Description
United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2012–2016)	Promotes improved access to education for vulnerable children and aims to build the capacity of the Government to address child labor. Overseen by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development.(72)
National Program for the Development of the Education Sector II (PNDSE II) (2011–2020)*	Aims to improve the quality of, and access to, basic and secondary education and increase employment opportunities through technology and skills training for school dropouts and youth without formal education. Overseen by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development and supported by international donors.(73, 74)

* Child labor elimination and prevention strategies do not appear to have been integrated into this policy.

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

In 2015, the Government drafted a National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons; however, it had not been approved by the end of the reporting period.(48, 75, 76). In addition, the Government's continued imprisonment of anti-slavery protestors limits its ability to address this issue comprehensively.(18, 43, 77-79)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2015, the Government of Mauritania funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery†	Government program that supports the reintegration and rehabilitation of former slaves.(80) In 2015, constructed and equipped 20 new schools in low-income rural areas.(81)
Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations†	Government program that provides food, shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable children, many of whom are talibés. Comprises seven government-operated locations in Aleg, Kaedi, Kiffa, Nouadhibou, Rosso, and in the El Mina and Dar-Naim regions of Nouakchott.(18, 43, 51) In 2015, served 373 children and monitored approximately 1,100 children.(43, 48)
Protection of Mauritanian Children Against Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Abuse, and Neglect (2014–2016)	\$1.9 million EU- and UNICEF-funded program, in partnership with MASEF, to combat child exploitation, including the worst forms of child labor. Operates in the regional provinces of Adrar, Assaba, Brakna, Gorgol, Guidimagha, Hodh Charghui, Hodh Gharbi, Nouadhibou, and Nouakchott.(5, 65, 82) In 2015, provided social and reintegration services to more than 12,374 children and protected 17,836 girls from female genital mutilation.(43, 48)
From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labor (2015–2019)*	USDOL-funded global project implemented by the ILO to support global and national efforts aimed at combating forced labor of adults and children under the 2014 ILO Protocol and supporting Recommendation to C.29 on Forced Labor.(83) List of project activities to be finalized in 2016.(83)
Child Protection Training Centert	Government program that provides training on child protection, including child labor, to local organizations in Selibaby.(61)
UNODC Impact Program	EU-funded program that aims to assist West and North African states implement the Migrant Smuggling Protocol by strengthening criminal justice systems through improved legislative frameworks, stronger government capacity, improved data collection and analysis techniques, and awareness raising.(84, 85)
Poverty Reduction Project	\$38.4 million UN International Fund for Agricultural Development-funded project in Aftout South and Karakoro. (86) Targets 21,000 households and aims to assist rural communities through the provision of loans and grants to improve livelihoods, economic opportunities, and food security.(87)
Refugee Assistance Programs†	MASEF Office of Childhood programs that raise awareness among NGOs operating in the M'Bera refugee camp on ways to address child exploitation.(48, 88)
Education Priority Zones*†	Government program that combats social inequalities by providing equal opportunities to all primary school children throughout the country. Managed by the Ministry of National Education.(5, 89)
Access to Justice and Human Rights Program*	USDOS- and USAID-funded program implemented by the American Bar Association's Rule of Law Initiative and Search for Common Ground organization to promote the social and political rights of marginalized groups, including for former and current victims of slavery, and to expand the public and political participation of those groups. (90)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Mauritania.

Although Mauritania has programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, especially in agriculture, herding, and domestic work, as well as for children in hereditary and indentured slavery.(6, 61) Moreover, as recently as August 2015, some government officials did not acknowledge that slavery continues, despite its prohibition.(43, 79, 91) In addition, the lack of recent data on slavery limits the Government's ability to develop effective policies to address this issue comprehensively. More needs to be done to address the problem of slavery in Mauritania, particularly by increasing social programs for former slaves and carrying out a campaign to raise awareness of the national laws on slavery.(11, 54)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor, including its worst forms, in Mauritania (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including Its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that laws prohibit children from being used, procured, or offered for the production and trafficking of drugs.	2009–2015
	Ensure that the law's light work provisions are specific enough to prevent children from being involved in child labor.	2015
	Ensure that the law's minimum age provisions and protections apply to children in unpaid, temporary, or non-contractual work.	2012–2015
	Ensure that penalties are high enough to deter violators of child labor laws.	2015
	Ensure that the types of work that children perform in Mauritania that fall into an R.190 category are prohibited to children under age 18.	2009–2015
Enforcement	Increase resources for law enforcement officials and the number of labor inspectors responsible for enforcing laws related to child labor, in order to provide adequate coverage of the workforce.	2010–2015
	Authorize the inspectorate to assess penalties.	2015
	Strengthen the inspection system by initiating routine and targeted inspections, rather than performing inspections solely based on complaints received.	2014–2015
	Ensure that criminal law enforcement officials receive training on new laws related to the worst forms of child labor.	2015
	Collect and make public information on the number of labor inspections; the number of child labor law violations, citations, and penalties assessed; and the number of criminal prosecutions and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.	2011–2015
	Effectively enforce legal provisions for compulsory education.	2010–2015
Coordination	Ensure that the Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group and the National Council for Children are active and receive adequate funding to fulfill their missions.	2014–2015
Government Policies	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into the National Strategy for the Protection of Children and the National Program for the Development of the Education II.	2009–2015
	Approve the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons.	2015
	Take steps to ensure anti-slavery protestors' rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.	2011–2015
Social Programs	Increase access to education by— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increasing school infrastructure and teacher availability, especially in rural areas; ■ Ensuring that school administrators and teachers allow children without birth certificates to attend school and sit and take national standardized examinations to graduate; and ■ Making sure that all children, including those from families of slave descent and refugees, have access to education. 	2011–2015
	Expand the scope of programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, herding, domestic work, and other sectors in which children work, as well as the issue of children in hereditary and indentured slavery.	2009–2015
	Implement a continuous, awareness-raising program for government officials on the laws related to slavery and the worst forms of child labor.	2012–2015

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including Its Worst Forms (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Collect data on slavery to develop effective policies and programs that identify and protect children at risk.	2010–2015
	Increase funding for social programs that provide services to former slaves.	2015

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