

In 2014, Mauritania made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government adopted the Roadmap for the Eradication of the Vestiges of Slavery based upon UN recommendations that raises awareness of slavery practices and implements programs that provide former slaves with access to education and livelihood opportunities. The Government also continued to operate regional centers that provide food, shelter, education, and training to children withdrawn from child labor. Further, the Government participated in two new programs to combat the worst forms of child labor. However, children in Mauritania are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and herding, and in the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary servitude. Mauritania's legal framework does not prohibit hazardous occupations and activities in all relevant child labor sectors, including agriculture; and does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities. 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 detain anti-slavery protestors.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Mauritania are engaged in child labor, including in agriculture and herding.(1-3) Children are also engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary servitude.(3-5) 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 (%)		68.7

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2012, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2015.(6)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3, 2007.(7)

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* (1, 8-12)
	Herding and caring for cattle, goats, sheep,*and camels* (1-3, 13, 14)
	Capturing and processing fish* (1-3, 9-12, 15-17)
Industry	Crushing gravel* for construction sites (1, 3, 18)
	Domestic work† (2, 3, 9, 10, 13, 19-21)
Services	Work as car mechanics* and painters* (9, 11, 12, 15, 17)
	Garbage scavenging* (9, 11, 12, 15)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Street work,* including as market vendors,* shoe shiners,* beggars,†* and in the transportation sector* (2, 3, 11, 15, 16, 18, 22)
	Forced begging, as a result of criminal gang recruitment and by Koranic teachers (1, 3, 4, 11, 12, 18, 21, 23)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation* sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (3, 4, 9, 10, 15)
	Used in illicit activities, including selling drugs* (1, 9, 11, 16, 24)
	Indentured and hereditary servitude (4, 5, 14, 24-26)
	Forced labor in domestic work and camel jockeying* each sometimes as a result of human trafficking* (2-4, 9, 27)

* 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 in hereditary servitude, as slaves, and endure slave-like practices in remote areas of the country.(3-5, 14, 21, 24-26) Some children are born into slavery, while others are forced to work the land and turn over what they produce to their master in order to remain on the land.(1, 28, 29) Some child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor.(1, 3, 4, 14, 28) Those who attempt to escape could be killed.(14, 24) Some former slaves (commonly descendants of slaves) continue to endure slave-like practices, including working for their former masters in exchange for food, money, and lodging.(1, 5)

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 for more than 12 hours a day without adequate food or shelter.(1, 3, 4, 21, 23)




Although the Constitution guarantees free compulsory primary education, in practice, this provision is not enforced effectively, as many children do not attend school.(1, 30-32) The lack of school infrastructure and limited availability of teachers impede access to education, which may increase the vulnerability of children to the worst forms of child labor. In addition, many children in Mauritania are not registered at birth.(29, 32-36) Unable to prove citizenship, unregistered children may have difficulty accessing services such as education.(4, 36-38)

In 2014, Mauritania hosted approximately 54,700 Malian refugees.(39) Refugee children may have difficulty accessing education, which could put them at increased risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labor.(40, 41) The Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF), in collaboration with the UN Children’s Fund, continued work on their study, “Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Labor in Mauritania,” but it has yet to publish the results.(3)

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 2004-017 (42)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 247 of the Labor Code 2004-017 (42)
Prohibition of Hazardous Occupations or Activities for Children	Yes		Article 2 of Law No. 1797; Article 42 of the Penal Protection Code for Children(43, 44)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 1 of Law 2007-048; Article 4 of Law 025/2003; Article 1 of Law 2013-011 (45-47)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 1 and 3 of Law 025/2003 (46)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 24, 25, and 26 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (Ordinance 2005-015) (33, 44)
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(48, 49)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (30, 31)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (30)

* No conscription (49)

Mauritanian law is not completely consistent with international standards regarding child labor. Although Law No. 1797 prohibits the employment of children in domestic work and the Penal Protection Code for Children prohibits employing and provoking children to beg, the law does not prohibit hazardous occupations and activities in all relevant child labor sectors, including agriculture.(43, 44, 50) Children working in unpaid, temporary, or non-contractual work do not have the same protections under child labor laws and regulations as children working in contractual employment.(8, 42, 51)

The Government has no law that prohibits the use of children for illicit activities, such as selling drugs.(24, 34, 52) 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 and activities prohibited for children; however, the Government has not enacted this legislation. (3, 53, 54)

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's Labor and Inspection Office	Receive and investigate labor complaints.(55)
Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family's (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(CPISE).(55)
Ministry of Justice's Direction of the Judiciary for Protection of Children	Coordinate child protection issues and oversee tribunals that sentence child offenders and the work of the Special Brigade for Minors.(50)
National Commission for Human Rights	Advocate for the eradication of slavery and receive complaints and conduct investigations on human rights violations, including the worst forms of child labor.(12)
Ministry of the Interior's 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.(23, 50)
National Police	Investigate crimes against children.(50)
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.(4, 5, 50, 56-58) File complaints on behalf of citizens who accuse their employers of practicing slavery and bring cases of alleged slavery to the authorities for investigation.(59, 60)

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Law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms.

Labor Law Enforcement

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Labor's Labor and Inspection Office employed 72 labor inspectors in 13 regional offices.(61) While none of the labor inspectors specialize in child labor, 17 inspectors received training on child labor issues.(3, 32, 62) The Government budgeted \$33,300 to MASEF's Office of Childhood, and \$33,300 to the Ministry of Labor's Labor and Inspection Office to support activities to end child labor.(3) The inspectorate does not initiate routine or targeted inspections based on analysis of compliance data or patterns of complaints. Information is unavailable on the number and quality of inspections, notification system for inspections, number of child labor law violations found, number of citations issued, and whether appropriate penalties were applied.(3)

Criminal Law Enforcement

During the reporting period, the Special Brigade for Minors employed 10 officers.(3) Given the prevalence of child labor in the country, the number of officers is inadequate. Research did not uncover whether they were provided with training on child labor issues. In collaboration with NGOs, the Special Brigade for Minors handled 4,167 criminal cases involving the worst form of child labor.(63) Research did not uncover information about the number of prosecutions, convictions, or whether appropriate penalties were applied related to the criminal enforcement of labor laws. Research found that the police generally lacked resources, which stymied investigation of cases, including those involving the worst forms of child labor.(32, 62)

Research did not find a formal referral mechanism in place between law enforcement agencies and social welfare services; however, victims are generally referred to MASEF's Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations or to NGOs depending on the case and location.(3)

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 6).

Table 6. 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. Composed of MASEF's Office of Childhood; the Ministry of Justice's Office of Child Judiciary Protection; the Ministry of Interior; the National Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society; NGOs; and international organizations.(55, 64)
National Council for Children	Coordinate and monitor government efforts on child protection and development.(53) Chaired by the Office of the Prime Minister and comprised of officials from MASEF, the Ministries of Justice, Health, Education, and Social Security. Also includes nongovernmental stakeholders such as NGOs, international organizations, and social partners.(65)

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.(3, 53, 66)

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 7).

Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery	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).(3, 67)
Roadmap for the Eradication of the Vestiges of Slavery†	Calls for an awareness-raising campaign on slavery, the revision of slavery laws and policies, implementation of programs that provide former slaves with access to education and livelihood opportunities, and assistance to former slaves who wish to return to their home countries.(68-70) Based on 29 of 42 recommendations made by the UN's Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery after an official mission to Mauritania.(28, 67-69)

Table 7. Policies Related to Child Labor (cont)

Policy	Description
Decent Work Country Program (2012-2015)	Acknowledges that child labor is a problem in Mauritania and calls for research and training for labor inspectors, judges, and other stakeholders on child labor issues.(71)
Strategic Framework to Fight Poverty (2011-2015)	Seeks to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, provide quality education to vulnerable children, and protect the rights of children.(72)
National Strategy for the Protection of Children in Mauritania and Action Plan (2010-2014)*	Aims to increase access to social services for vulnerable children and establish a system to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate service provision for children.(3, 73, 74)
PRSP II (2011-2015)	Seeks to eliminate child labor and includes plans to increase access to quality education for all children.(3, 75, 76)
UNDAF (2012-2016)	Promotes improved access to education for vulnerable children and aims to build the capacity of the Government to address child labor.(77)

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

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

In 2014, the National Agency for the Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty (Tadamoun) implemented the National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery in 2014, however, the effectiveness of such policy was hampered by budget constraints.(67) Although the Government of Mauritania has policies to address slavery, research found no evidence of a policy to combat other worst forms of child labor.(32, 53, 78). Moreover, the Government's detention of anti-slavery protestors in 2014 and the lack of recent data on slavery hampers its ability to address this issue comprehensively by developing effective policies.(3, 24, 78-80)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2014, the Government of Mauritania funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms. The Government has other programs that may have an impact on child labor, including its worst forms (Table 8).

Table 8. 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.(4)
Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations (CPISE)‡	Government program that provides food, shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable children, many of whom are talibés. In 2014, the Government opened a new CPISE in Nouakchott and operates five other CPISEs in Kiffa, Rosso, Nouadhibou, and the El Mina and Dar-Naim regions of Nouakchott.(3, 55) The Centers served 321 children during the reporting period.(4)
Child Protection Training Center‡	Government program that provides training on child protection to local organizations, including child labor, in the town of Selibaby.(64)
Protection of Mauritanian Children Against Violence, Exploitation, Discrimination, Abuse, and Neglect (VEDAN) (2014-2016)†	Approximately \$1.9 million program launched by the European Union and UNICEF, in partnership with MASEF, to combat child exploitation, including the worst forms of child labor. The project will operate in 10 regional provinces.(67)
UNODC Impact Program*	EU-funded, government program that aims to assist West and North African States in implementing 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.(81, 82)
Poverty Reduction Project*	Approximately \$38.4 million, UN International Fund for Agricultural Development-funded project in Aftout South and Karakoro.(83) 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.(84)
Refugee Assistance Programs‡	MASEF's Office of Childhood programs that raises awareness among NGOs operating in the M'Bera refugee camp on ways to address child exploitation.(33)
Youth Employment Programs*‡	Ministry of Labor program, with support from the ILO, that trains job counselors on how to assist youth in finding decent work.(85)

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Table 8. Social Programs to Address Child Labor (cont)

Program	Description
Child Camel Jockeys Program†‡	\$139,000, government program co-funded with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that supports the reintegration and rehabilitation of Mauritanian children that were trafficked to the UAE to work as camel jockeys. The program served 400 child trafficking victims during the reporting period.(3)

*The impact of this program on child labor does not appear to have been studied.

† 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, domestic work, as well as children in hereditary and indentured servitude.(64) Research could not find out whether Tadamoun funded any social programs in 2014 aimed specifically at combating child labor.(50) Moreover, as recently as September 2014, some government officials did not acknowledge that slavery continues despite its prohibition.(86) The UN reports that more needs to be done to address the problem of slavery in Mauritania, and the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery suggested that the Government increase funding for social programs for former slaves and carry out a campaign to raise awareness of the national laws on slavery.(60)

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 9).

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including Its Worst Forms

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure the law prohibits hazardous occupations and activities in all relevant child labor sectors, including agriculture.	2009 – 2014
	Ensure that the law's minimum age provisions and protections apply to children in unpaid, temporary, or noncontract work.	2012 – 2014
	Ensure the law specifically prohibits the use of children in illicit activities.	2009 – 2014
	Adopt the law on prohibiting the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2014
Enforcement	Increase the number of training, resources, criminal investigators, and labor inspectors responsible for enforcing laws related to child labor in order to provide adequate coverage of the workforce.	2010 – 2014
	Strengthen the inspection system by initiating routine or targeted inspections, rather than performing inspections solely based on complaints received.	2014
	Collect and make public information on number, type, and quality of labor inspections; number of child labor law violations, citations, and penalties assessed; as well as criminal prosecutions and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.	2011 – 2014
	Effectively enforce compulsory education legal provisions.	2010 – 2014
	Establish a referral mechanism between the law enforcement agencies and MASEF to ensure victims of child labor receive appropriate social services.	2014
Coordination	Ensure the Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group and the National Council for Children are active and receive adequate funding to fulfill their mission.	2014
Government Policies	Adopt a more comprehensive policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor.	2013 – 2014
	Integrate child labor elimination and prevention strategies into existing policies.	2009 – 2014
	Ensure appropriate funding exists to effectively implement the National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery.	2014
	Take steps to ensure anti-slavery protestors' rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.	2011 – 2014
	Collect data on slavery to develop effective policies that identify and protect children at risk.	2010 – 2014
Social Programs	Ensure that all children have access to education, including refugees, by registering children at birth, and establishing and implementing a program to address the lack of teachers and schools.	2011 – 2014

Table 9. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor, Including Its Worst Forms (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	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 children in hereditary and indentured servitude.	2009 – 2014
	Make publicly available the study on child trafficking and the worst forms of child labor in Mauritania.	2012 – 2014
	Implement a continuous, awareness-raising program on worst forms of child labor laws and for government officials on slavery.	2012 – 2014
	Assess the impact that existing social programs may have on addressing child labor.	2011 – 2014

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