

In 2016, Mauritania made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the year, the Government of Mauritania ratified the ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention and established three regional Anti-Slavery Courts, resulting in the country's second ever slavery conviction. The Government also funded and participated in multiple programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including programs that provide social protection services to vulnerable children and combat forced labor of adults and children. However, Mauritania is receiving this assessment because it continued to implement a regression in policy that delayed advancement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor. Since 2011, the Government of Mauritania has required proof of marriage and biological parents' citizenship in order to get a birth certificate. As a result, children born out of wedlock and many Haratine and sub-Saharan ethnic minority children have been prevented from being registered at birth.



As birth certificates are required to enroll in secondary school in Mauritania, children as young as 12 cannot access education, making them more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Children in Mauritania perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, particularly in herding cattle and goats. Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary slavery. Other gaps remain, which include the lack of legal prohibitions for the use, procurement, and offering of children for the production and trafficking of drugs and limited resources for the systematic enforcement of child labor laws. In addition, the Government continued to imprison and physically mistreat anti-slavery protestors during the year.

I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Mauritania perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, particularly in herding cattle and goats.(1-6) Children also engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary slavery.(2, 7-10) 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 to 14	12.5 (131,552)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	53.5
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	8.2
Primary Completion Rate (%)		68.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016.(11)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4 (MICS 4), 2011.(12)

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, and millet (6, 13, 14)
	Herding and caring for cattle, goats, sheep, and camels (1-6)
	Fishing and processing fish (2-5, 14)

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Industry	Crushing gravel (5)
Services	Domestic work† (1-4, 6, 7, 15)
	Working as car mechanics, painters, and carpenters (2-4, 6, 14)
	Garbage scavenging (2, 4, 14)
	Street work, including as market vendors, shoe shiners, beggars,† and in the transportation sector (2-6, 8, 14)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced begging as a result of criminal gang recruitment and by Koranic teachers (2, 3, 5, 9, 15, 16)
	Commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4, 5, 7, 9)
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (4, 6, 14)
	Indentured and hereditary slavery (2, 7-9, 17)
	Forced labor in domestic work and camel jockeying, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3, 5, 9, 13, 18, 19)

† 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, especially from the Haratine ethnic minority, 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 born free, but remain in a dependent status and are forced to work with their parents for their former masters in exchange for food, money, and lodging.(4, 6, 8, 9, 20, 21) Some child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, or perform domestic labor.(3, 5-7, 18)

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.(1, 3-5, 9, 16)

Since 2011, the Government of Mauritania has required proof of marriage and biological parents’ citizenship in order to get a birth certificate. As a result, children born out of wedlock and many Haratine and sub-Saharan ethnic minority children have been prevented from being registered at birth. As birth certificates are required to enroll in secondary school in Mauritania, children as young as 12 could not access education, making them more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (4, 6, 9, 16, 20-24) In addition, 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.(5, 8, 10, 25-27) Children from families of slave descent also face barriers to accessing education due to societal discrimination.(1, 6, 20)

In 2016, Mauritania hosted approximately 44,965 Malian refugees.(28) Refugee children may have difficulty accessing education, which could put them at increased risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labor.(8, 28-30) In addition, evidence indicates that refugee children are involved in herding activities which take them out of refugee camps for long periods of time and older boys are vulnerable to recruitment by non-state armed groups. (31-33)

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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor (cont)

Convention	Ratification
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

In March 2016, the Government of Mauritania ratified ILO Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labor Convention.(34)

The Government has established laws and regulations related to child labor, including its worst forms (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Mauritania’s legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	14	Article 153 of the Labor Code (35)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 247 of the Labor Code (35)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited 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; Article 54 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (37, 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 Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	N/A*		
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Article 7 of Law 62132/1962 (41, 42)
Non-State Compulsory	Yes	18	Article 43 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (37)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (25, 43)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (25)

* No conscription (42)

The Labor Code allows children between ages 12 and 14 to perform light work, as long as it does not impede their school attendance, exceed two hours of work per day, and is authorized by the Ministry of Labor.(35) However, the Labor Code does not specify the activities in which light work may be permitted.(44) 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.(5, 35, 45)

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. (6, 27) The law prohibits some 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.(5, 6, 44)

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). However, gaps in labor law and criminal law enforcement remain and some enforcement information is not available.

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor Office of Labor and Inspection	Enforce labor laws and investigates Labor Code infractions, including those on child labor.(5, 6, 15)
Ministry of the Interior’s Special Brigade for Minors	Investigate crimes against children, including human trafficking, and monitor religious schools, or <i>mahadras</i> , to ensure that children are not forced to beg on behalf of their teachers. Operates in Nouakchott.(4-6, 15, 46)
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.(4, 5, 15) In 2016, received an operating budget of \$10,300.(30)
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. (5, 15, 46)
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.(4, 15, 47)
National Agency for the Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty (<i>Tadamoun</i>)	Develop and implement programs to tackle poverty, promote the integration of refugees, and rehabilitate former slaves.(17, 47, 48) File complaints on behalf of citizens who accuse their employers of practicing slavery and bring cases of alleged slavery to the authorities for investigation.(9, 47, 49) In 2016, submitted seven slavery complaints to the Ministry of Justice for investigation.(30)
Regional Anti-Slavery Courts*	Prosecute crimes related to slavery and provide free legal assistance to victims, including children. The three regional courts located in Nema, Nouakchott, and Nouadhibou were created under the Roadmap for the Eradication of the Vestiges of Slavery.(9, 30, 50-53)

* Agency responsible for child labor enforcement was created during the reporting period.

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2016, 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	2015	2016
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$33,300 (54)	\$33,300 (5)
Number of Labor Inspectors	67 (55)	67 (5)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (54, 56)	No (5, 56)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (57)	Yes (5)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	N/A (54)	N/A (5)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (57)	Yes (5)
Number of Labor Inspections	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Number Conducted by Desk Reviews	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Number of Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Routine Inspections Conducted	No (54)	No (5)
Routine Inspections Targeted	No (54)	No (54)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (57)	Yes (57)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (57)	Yes (57)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (55)	Yes (55)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (54, 55)	Yes (55)

In 2016, the Ministry of Labor employed 47 full-time labor inspectors and 20 full-time labor controllers, who are disseminated in 13 regional offices to enforce labor laws, including those related to child labor. The Ministry lacked equipment, transportation, and funding to conduct child labor inspections, especially in remote locations. (5, 15, 27, 58) In addition, the penalties established for violating child labor laws are insufficient and do not generally deter violations. (5, 6)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2016, 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	2015	2016
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (57)	Yes (57)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	No (54)	No (54)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (57)	Yes (30)
Number of Investigations	4,200 (55)	Unknown (5)
Number of Violations Found	Unknown (54)	Unknown (5)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (57)	Unknown (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (57)	Yes (57)

In 2016, the Special Brigade for Minors employed 10 officers and investigated 600 cases. However, research could not determine how many of the cases involved child labor. (5) Reports indicate that NGOs referred 1,287 cases of child abuse to government social services; however, research did not identify how many of these cases were investigated by law enforcement agencies or involved child labor. (5)

During the reporting period, the newly established Anti-Slavery Courts received 46 cases of slavery, which resulted in the country's second ever slavery conviction in May 2016. The offenders were sentenced to five years' imprisonment and ordered to pay restitution for the victims of about \$2,851; the actual time served was determined to be one year, with four years suspended with probation. (6, 30, 50, 52, 53) In addition, in November 2016, the Court of Appeals of Nouakchott handed down a sentence of two years' imprisonment and fine of approximately \$6,400 for a separate child slavery case. (30) Despite these efforts, the penalties associated with both cases did not comply with the minimum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment established by law for slavery offences. (6, 30) In addition, evidence shows that the actions taken by criminal law enforcement authorities were inadequate to address the worst forms of child labor, including indentured and hereditary slavery, given the magnitude of the problem. In general, enforcement authorities, including the newly established Anti-Slavery Courts, remained understaffed, underfunded, and without adequate office supplies, transportation, and fuel to enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor effectively. (9, 15, 30, 50, 53, 58-60)

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. Key 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. Chaired by MASEF's Office of Childhood and includes representatives from various ministries, as well as local and international organizations. (5)

The Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group was inactive and did not receive any funding during the reporting period. (6, 22)

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V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

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

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor (PANETE-RIM) (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. Overseen by the Ministry of Labor.(2, 3, 5, 6)
National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery (2014–2017)	Aims to prevent slavery through improvements in education and health, and by providing victims with income-generating activities. Falls under the direction of the <i>Tadamoun</i> .(55, 61) In 2016, implemented income-generating activities in impoverished communities of former slaves groups.(5, 9, 30)
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, and the implementation of programs that provide former slaves with access to education and livelihood opportunities. Overseen by the Office of the Prime Minister.(5, 10, 62, 63) In 2016, supported the creation of the Regional Anti-Slavery Courts.(5)
National Child Protection Strategy (SNPE)	Aims to protect children from abuse, violence, and exploitation and promotes improved access to education and livelihood services for vulnerable children. Led by MASEF and supported by international donors.(2, 4) In 2016, implemented activities to improve child protection data collection systems.(4, 5)
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.(27, 64)

During the reporting period, the Government did not approve the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons that was drafted in 2015.(57, 65) Reports indicate that efforts to implement most of the key policies related to child labor have been slowed due to insufficient allocation of resources.(4, 10, 22, 58) In addition, the Government’s continued imprisonment and physical mistreatment of anti-slavery protestors significantly limits its ability to address this issue comprehensively.(6, 9, 58, 66, 67)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2016, the Government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor, including its worst forms (Table 10).

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
<u>From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labor (2015–2019)</u>	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.(34, 68) In 2016, conducted workshops to raise awareness on forced labor and slavery-like practices.(66, 69) For additional information about USDOL’s work, please visit our Web site .
Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery†	Government program that supports the reintegration and rehabilitation of former slaves. In 2016, developed plans to increase educational opportunities for at-risk youth from slave descendant.(9)
Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations (CEPISE)†	MASEF operated program that provides food, shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable children, many of whom are <i>talibés</i> . Operates in Aleg, Kaedi, Kiffa, Nouadhibou, Rosso, and Nouakchott. In 2016, received a budget of \$ 100,000 that allowed the program to serve 540 children.(4-6, 15, 22, 27, 30)
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 nine regional provinces. In 2016, established 46 child protection units that provided reintegration services to more than 25,000 children.(2, 5, 70)
Access to Justice and Human Rights Program	USDOS- and USAID-funded program implemented by the American Bar Association to promote the social and political rights of marginalized groups, including for former and current child victims of slavery. In 2016, trained community-based paralegals that provided services to 176 project participants.(71, 72)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (cont)

Program	Description
Countering Trafficking in Persons (2015–2017)	\$425,000 Government of Germany-funded, 2-year project implemented by IOM to raise awareness of human trafficking among vulnerable communities and build the capacity of government actors to enforce laws related to trafficking in persons. In 2016, trained 31 magistrates and court clerks on combating human trafficking.(73, 74)
UNICEF Country Program (2012–2016)	\$13.3 million UNICEF funded program that supports the Government’s efforts to improve education, birth registration rates, social inclusion, and protection for children, including refugees.(5, 70)
World Bank Country Program	\$41.4 million World Bank-funded projects that aim to increase access to quality basic and secondary education, improve school infrastructure, and strengthen safety nets for vulnerable populations in rural areas, including children.(75, 76)

† 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.(5, 54) Moreover, as recently as May 2016, some government officials did not acknowledge that slavery continues, despite its prohibition.(21, 58, 66, 77) In addition, the lack of recent data on slavery limits the Government’s ability to develop effective policies to address this issue comprehensively. Existing social programs for former slaves and awareness of the national laws on slavery are insufficient.(1, 21, 49, 77)

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– 2016
	Ensure that the law’s light work provisions are specific enough to prevent children from being involved in child labor.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure that the law’s minimum age provisions and protections apply to children in unpaid, temporary, or non-contractual work.	2012 – 2016
	Ensure that the hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children are comprehensive.	2009 – 2016
Enforcement	Increase the training and number of law enforcement officials, as well as the resources for labor and criminal law enforcement agencies, including the courts, to adequately enforce child labor laws, especially in remote areas.	2010 – 2016
	Authorize the inspectorate to assess penalties.	2015 – 2016
	Strengthen the inspection system by initiating routine and targeted inspections, rather than performing inspections solely based on complaints received.	2014 – 2016
	Increase efforts to ensure that cases of the worst forms of child labor, including indentured and hereditary slavery, are investigated and prosecuted in accordance with the law.	2016
	Publish information on the number of labor inspections, child labor law violations, and penalties assessed; and the number of criminal investigations, prosecutions, and convictions related to the worst forms of child labor.	2011 – 2016
Coordination	Ensure that penalties are high enough to deter violators of child labor laws.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure that the Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group is active and receives adequate funding to fulfill its mission.	2014 – 2016
Government Policies	Approve the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons.	2015 – 2016
	Ensure key policies related to child labor receive sufficient funds for effective implementation.	2016
	Take steps to ensure the safety of anti-slavery protestors, as well as their rights of freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.	2011 – 2016

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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	Enhance efforts to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for all children, including those from families of slave descent and refugees, by— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increasing school infrastructure and teacher availability, especially in rural areas; and ■ Ensuring that all children are able to obtain birth certificates to increase their access to secondary education and reduce their vulnerability to the worst forms of child labor. 	2011 – 2016
	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 – 2016
	Implement a continuous, awareness-raising program for government officials on the laws related to slavery and the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2016
	Collect data on slavery to develop effective policies and programs that identify and protect children at risk.	2010 – 2016
	Increase funding for social programs that provide services to former slaves.	2015 – 2016

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