

In 2012, Mauritania made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government passed a new UN Assistance Development Framework that aims to provide educational assistance to vulnerable and exploited children, and increased its number of labor inspectors from 60 to 80. However, Mauritania's legal framework lacks a hazardous occupations list, does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, and does not provide protection for children working without a contract, excluding many children, for example, who work on the streets or perform unpaid work. In addition, the Government continued to detain anti-slavery protestors. Social programs are not sufficient to address the needs of children engaged in the worst forms of child labor. Children continue to be engaged in the worst forms of child labor, particularly in dangerous forms in the agriculture and herding sectors, as well as hereditary servitude and slavery in all areas of the country.



Statistics on Working Children and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working	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		74.8

Sources:

Primary completion rate: Data from 2010, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2013.(1)

All other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from MICS3, 2007.(2)

Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Mauritania are engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including dangerous activities in agriculture, herding, and indentured and hereditary servitude.(3-5) Although information is limited, there are reports that children work in the production of beans, rice, and vegetables.(5-8) Children working in agriculture may use dangerous tools, carry heavy loads, and apply harmful pesticides.(7, 9) Children herd and care for livestock, such as cattle and goats.(4, 5, 10) While research is limited, evidence suggests that children also herd camels and sheep.(11, 12) Children herding livestock may suffer injuries such as being bitten, butted, gored, or trampled by animals.(13, 14) Limited evidence also suggests that

children work in the fishing sector.(5) These children may work long hours, perform physically demanding tasks, and face dangers such as drowning.(15, 16) Children also crush gravel for construction and deliver water to construction sites.(4)

Some children are engaged in criminal street gangs and are forced to beg and sell drugs.(5, 17) In addition, some male street children are Koranic students, or *talibés*.(5, 18, 19) In Mauritania, it is traditional practice to send boys to Koranic teachers to receive education that may include vocational training or apprenticeship.(5, 18, 19) Some Koranic teachers, or *marabouts*, force *talibés* to beg for more than 12 hours a day, without adequate food or shelter.(5, 18-21) In addition, some children work as apprentices. Over 48 percent of apprentices are beaten and some are forced to work for many years.(11)

Girls, many of whom are between ages 7 and 14, work as domestic servants in urban households in Nouakchott; many of these girls reportedly come from the Senegal River Valley and Assaba geographic regions.(5, 12, 22) Some child domestics are beaten, work long hours, often without pay, and 1 percent are sexually abused.(12, 21, 23-25)

Children in Mauritania continue to be exploited in hereditary servitude, as slaves, and endure slave-like practices in remote areas of the country.(17, 26-29) 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. Some child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor.(4, 5, 28, 30-32) Those that attempt to escape are reportedly beaten or killed.(17)

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Some former slaves (commonly descendants of slaves) continue to endure slave-like practices, including working for their former masters in exchange for minimal food, money, and lodging.(31)

Mauritania is a source and destination country for trafficked children.(28) Children are trafficked domestically within Mauritania for forced labor in herding and domestic labor.(4, 28) Internally, girls are trafficked for domestic labor and commercial sexual exploitation, and boys are trafficked for forced begging as *talibés* on the streets of Nouakchott.(20, 21, 28) *Talibés* are also trafficked from Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Senegal to Mauritania for forced begging.(28, 33) Girls are trafficked from Mali and the Gambia for domestic service and from Senegal for domestic service and commercial sexual exploitation in Mauritania.(28, 34) During the reporting period, there were reports of girls between the ages of 5 and 13 being trafficked from Mauritania to the Middle East under the guise of marriage, but who were instead victims of commercial sexual exploitation.(4, 17, 28)

There are reports of children working on the streets, especially in urban areas such as Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Kiffa, and Rosso, but specific information on hazards is unknown.(4, 12)

Reports indicate that droughts and agriculture pest infestations have caused an increase in unemployment, inflation, and poverty, leaving children vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor.(35-37) Research further suggests that a lack of school infrastructure and limited availability of teachers impedes access to education, which also increases the vulnerability of children to the worst forms of child labor.(31, 38, 39) Many children in Mauritania are also not registered at birth. Unable to prove citizenship, unregistered children may have difficulty accessing services such as education.(40, 41) In addition, in 2012, Mauritania experienced an influx of refugees from Mali. Midway through the year, only 20 percent of refugee children had access to education in Mauritania, which put them at increased risk of engaging in the worst forms of child labor.(42-44)

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Code (2004-017) sets the minimum age for employment at 14.(45, 46) At age 12, children may perform light work in establishments in which their family members are employed, provided that they have the Ministry of Labor's authorization and remain in school.(45) The Labor Code prohibits children younger than 14 from working at night. It also bans children younger than age 18 from work that is

dangerous, beyond their strength, or likely to harm their safety, health, or morals.(45, 47) All laws regarding regular work also apply to apprenticeships.(48) Nevertheless, the Government lacks a hazardous occupations list that specifies activities considered hazardous for children.(6, 49) In addition, the Labor Code only applies to contractual labor, excluding many children, for example, who work on the streets or perform unpaid work.(6, 45, 50)

International Conventions and Selected Laws on Child Labor and Education

	C138, Minimum Age	✓
	C182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
	CRC	✓
	CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	No
	CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
	Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓
	Minimum Age for Work	14
	Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18
	Compulsory Education Age	14
	Free Public Education	Yes

Regulation No. 1797 of the Labor Code establishes the minimum standards of the workplace, contracts, leave, and access to social security for domestic workers, including child care providers, in accordance with ILO Convention 189.(6, 31) Although the Government partnered with local NGOs, UNICEF, and Terre des Hommes to draft a law against the worst forms of child labor, it did not enact this legislation.(4)

The Penal Protection Code for Children establishes penalties for sexually exploiting a child, for inciting a child to beg, or for giving authority to another person to do so.(51) The law also prohibits the production of child pornography.(38) It does not, however, prohibit the use of children in other illicit activities, such as selling drugs.(17, 39, 52)

Laws 2007-048 and 025/3003 prohibit forced and compulsory labor, as well as slavery and trafficking in persons.(52-54) This law also prescribes penalties for Government officials who do not respond to reported cases of forced labor and individuals

who profit from or procure slaves.(17) The minimum age for both voluntary and compulsory recruitment into the military is 18.(55) However, children between the ages of 16 and 18 are permitted to participate in the armed forces if they receive parental consent.(56)

According to Law 2001-054, the Government has established the right to free primary education until the age of 14. However, in practice, the free education provision is not effectively enforced as many children do not attend school.(4, 5, 46, 57)

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

The multi-stakeholder Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group coordinates child labor and child trafficking efforts and comprises the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF); the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Interior; the National Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society; NGOs; and international organizations.(4) This Group met five times in 2012 and reportedly effectively coordinated activities.(58) It also held a workshop in January 2013 to present a draft law on the worst forms of child labor.(4) During the reporting period, the Government created structures to monitor child protection issues in the Gorgol and Guidimaka regions and allocated \$16,000 to this effort.(4)

The MASEF has primary responsibility for both child labor policy and monitoring all alleged violations of child labor laws, including those related to the worst forms of child labor.(4) The MASEF is also responsible for developing and implementing programs to protect vulnerable children.(4) In 2012, the Government of Mauritania increased its number of labor inspectors from 60 to 80. However, there are no labor inspectors dedicated to child labor.(4) The ILO Committee of Experts reports that the labor inspectorate lacks staff and resources to carry out its mandate.(39, 59)

During the year, labor inspectors did not receive training on child labor issues, and no child labor inspections or investigations were performed by the Government. Furthermore, the Government did not make labor inspection data accessible to the public.(4) In 2012, the Government budgeted \$50,000 to MASEF's Labor Office and \$33,300 to the Office of Childhood to support the implementation of the national strategy and plan of action for the protection of children. However, there was no budget for labor inspections.(4)

The Ministry of Justice's Directorate of Judicial Protection for Children, the Commissariat for Human Rights, and the Ministry of Interior's Special Brigade for Minors also undertake activities that protect children and enforce laws, including the worst forms of child labor.(4) The Special Brigade for Minors in collaboration with NGOs identified 1,877 girls working as domestic servants in private homes from January to September 2012. However, no penalties or citation for child labor violations were issued during the year.(4) The Ministry of the Interior also monitors religious schools, or mahadras, to ensure that children are not forced to beg on behalf of their teachers.(20) Children are referred to social and other services through labor inspectors and the Special Brigade for Minors.(4)

During the reporting period, the police arrested two women accused in two separate cases of child slavery after receiving a complaint from an NGO. Both cases are pending prosecution.(21) However, there were no convictions involving the worst forms of child labor during the reporting period.(4, 21) Research indicates that the Government prefers to settle cases involving slavery out of court, as it is perceived as the quicker and more amicable way to resolve disputes.(31)

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The MASEF's National Strategy for the Protection of Children in Mauritania and Action Plan (2009-2013) aims to strengthen the legal system, increase access to social services for vulnerable children, and establish a system to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate service provision.(58, 60, 61) In addition, the Commission on Human Rights has established a national plan to combat the vestiges of slavery, which includes education as a means to reduce poverty.(12, 52) However, the Government has not yet adopted the plan. Furthermore, according to the ILO, the Government of Mauritania lacks reliable data to be able to provide the plan's services to all victims of slavery or those at risk.(12, 62)

During the reporting period, Government officials brought together Imams, clerics, educators, and human rights activists to sign the Nouakchott Declaration, which calls for increased protection of children.(63) The Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society, in cooperation with the UN, worked with stakeholders to develop an action plan for Mauritania's anti-trafficking efforts.(28)

The Government of Mauritania has other policies, such as the PRSP II 2011-2015, which calls for the elimination of child labor and includes plans to increase access to quality education

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for all children.(64, 65) The Government has a United Nations Assistance Development Framework (2012-2016) that aims to provide educational assistance to vulnerable and exploited children.(66) Finally, the Government of Mauritania has an Education Sector Development Program (2001-2015), which aims to increase children's access to education.(67) However, the question of whether child protection, poverty reduction, and educational policies have had an impact on child labor does not appear to have been addressed.

In 2012, the National Office of Statistics conducted a survey on child trafficking and the worst forms of child labor in Mauritania. According to UNICEF, the survey report is expected to be released in 2013.(4)

Social Programs to Eliminate or Prevent the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Since 2007, the Government has operated Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations (CPISEs) in the El Mina and Dar Naim regions of Nouakchott and in Kiffa. The CPISEs provide shelter for vulnerable children, many of whom are *talibés*.(3, 4, 31) In 2012, the Government allocated \$30,000 to the centers, opened a new center in Nouadhibou, and provided 90 children with assistance.(4, 31) In addition, the Government opened a child protection training center in the town of Selibaby. This center will provide training on child protection to local organizations, including child labor.(4)

The Government of Mauritania continued to participate in a 2-year project through September 2012 which aimed to strengthen legal frameworks and provide support to women and children engaged in slavery, domestic service, commercial sexual exploitation, and forced begging. The \$500,000 project was funded by USAID and assisted 70 *talibés* during the reporting period.(6, 21, 38, 68, 69) In June 2012, Mauritania completed its program to provide social and other services to children that had been trafficked for labor in the camel jockeying sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This program was funded by the UAE and UNICEF.(70, 71)

During the reporting period, the multi-stakeholder Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group presented its draft law on the worst forms of child labor to representative

government agencies.(28) The Government, in collaboration with UNICEF, also taught stakeholders how to perform rapid needs assessments for children in crisis situations and psychosocial monitoring of vulnerable children.(4)

The Government of Mauritania continued to participate in the EU-funded UNODC Impact Program, which aims to assist West and North African States in implementing the Migrant Smuggling Protocol. The Program aims to strengthen criminal justice systems by improving legislative frameworks, building government capacity, improving data collection and analysis techniques, and raising awareness.(72, 73) Under the Program, 12 traditional mediators from remote areas in which a formal justice system is absent were trained on the national legal framework, including child labor laws.(74)

During the year, the Mauritanian government participated in the \$29 million Poverty Reduction Project in Aftout South and Karakoro, funded by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development.(75) The Project 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.(76) The question of whether these programs have had an impact on child labor has not been addressed. In addition, despite these efforts, Mauritania's social programs are not sufficient to assist the numerous children engaged in the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, herding, domestic service, and indentured servitude.(4)

The Government's continued detention of anti-slavery protestors and the lack of recent data on slavery hampers its ability to comprehensively address this issue and develop programs for future initiatives.(17, 29, 32, 77, 78) Further, some government officials do not acknowledge that slavery continues despite its prohibition.(6) In particular, 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 recommended that a sustained awareness raising campaign be carried out in urban and rural areas to make all Mauritians aware of national laws on slavery.(79, 80)

Based on the reporting above, the following actions would advance the elimination of the worst forms of child labor in Mauritania:

Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Laws and Regulations	Draft and adopt a hazardous occupations list in accordance with international standards.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Ensure protection for children who are working on a noncontractual basis or engaging in unpaid work, such as children working on the streets.	2012
	Adopt the law on the worst forms of child labor.	2012
	Draft and adopt a law that prohibits the use of children in illicit activities.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
Coordination and Enforcement	Take all necessary measures to effectively enforce all worst forms of child labor laws, including labor inspections, investigation, prosecution, and conviction of violators of the law.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Provide sufficient funding, human resources, and personnel training for effective coordination, inspection, and enforcement efforts.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Make data regarding inspections, investigations, complaints, and prosecutions accessible to the public.	2011, 2012
	Effectively enforce free public education legal provisions.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Take steps to ensure that anti-slavery protestors are not unlawfully detained.	2011, 2012
Policies	Collect data on the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, to identify children in need of these services.	2010, 2011, 2012
	Assess the impact that existing policies may have on addressing the worst forms of child labor.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Make publicly available the survey on child trafficking and the worst forms of child labor in Mauritania.	2012
Social Programs	Conduct research on children engaged in street work, including specific activities and associated hazards, in order to inform policy and program design.	2012
	Expand the scope of programs to address the worst forms of child labor, including in agriculture, herding, domestic service, and other sectors in which children work, as well as children in hereditary and indentured servitude.	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Implement a continuous awareness-raising campaign in urban and rural areas on worst forms of child labor laws and provide support to victims of slavery to allow for their reintegration into society.	2012
	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, 2012

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Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Social Programs	Step up efforts to develop and implement programs to lessen the impact food shortages may have on rural populations.	2011, 2012
	Assess and evaluate the impact that existing education, social protection and livelihoods programs may have on addressing child labor.	2011, 2012

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