

In 2011, Mauritania made a minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. During the year, the Government of Mauritania passed a new Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (2011-2015) that includes plans to increase access to quality education. The Government also secured four child slavery convictions, which is considered significant, given the very limited number of convictions by the Government in past years. However, there are reports that the Government detained anti-slavery protestors during the year. In addition, some gaps remain in the legal framework, and social programs do not completely address the needs of children engaged in the worst forms of child labor. Children continue to engage 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 remote 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, 2012.(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 in dangerous activities in agriculture, herding and indentured and hereditary servitude.(3, 4) Children reportedly work growing beans, rice and vegetables.(3-5) Children herd and care for livestock, such as cattle and goats, and many work long hours and travel great distances. In rural areas, children who work on farms face risks from carrying heavy loads, using dangerous tools and exposure to chemicals.(4, 6-8) While research is limited, evidence suggests that children also work long hours herding camels and sheep as well.(6, 9, 10) Some reports note that children work in the fishing sector and risk drowning while out at sea.(11) Some children also burn wood to produce charcoal and risk injury from burns.(4, 6, 8)

In urban areas such as Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Kiffa and Rosso, children (commonly boys) work in the informal sector, as street vendors, garbage collectors, bus fare collectors, donkey cart drivers, and as apprentices for mechanics and other employers. They also crush gravel for construction and deliver water to construction sites.(4, 12) These children are reported to work more than 8 hours a day, 6 days a week and are required to carry heavy loads.(12) Some apprentices, commonly boys, are beaten and forced to work for many years by their master.(10, 12)

Some children are engaged in criminal street gangs and are forced to beg by gang members.(7, 13, 14) In addition, some male street children are Koranic students, or *talibés*.(7, 15, 16) In Mauritania, it is traditional practice to send boys to Koranic teachers to receive education, which may include vocational training or apprenticeship.(7, 15, 16) Most *talibés* in Mauritania are between ages 6 and 10 and come from the Pulaar tribes in the southern part of the country.(4, 17, 18) Some Koranic teachers, or *marabouts*, force *talibés* to beg for more than 12 hours a day, without adequate food or shelter.(7, 15, 16) Additionally, children working on the streets are vulnerable to severe weather, traffic accidents and crime.

Girls, many of whom are between ages 7 and 12, work as domestic servants in urban households in Nouakchott; many of these girls reportedly come from the Senegal River Valley and Assaba geographic regions.(7, 12, 17, 19) Many girls work for 6 to 10 hours a day, often without pay, and some are beaten and sexually abused.(7, 12, 17)

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In Mauritania, children reportedly continue to be exploited in hereditary servitude, slave and slave-like practices in remote areas of the country.(13, 20, 21) Some children are born into slavery, while others are forced to work the land and turn over what they produce to “masters” in order to remain on their land. Some child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor.(4, 20, 22, 23) Those that attempt to escape are reportedly beaten or killed.(13) Some former slaves (commonly descendents of slaves) continue to endure slave-like practices, including working for their former masters in exchange for minimal food, money, lodging, among other things.(23)

Mauritania is a source and destination country for trafficked children.(20) Reports indicate that children are trafficked within Mauritania for forced labor in agriculture, herding, domestic labor and fishing.(20, 24) In addition, children are trafficked domestically by street gang leaders to sell drugs. Internally, girls are trafficked for domestic labor and sexual exploitation, and boys are trafficked for forced begging as *talibés*.(7, 18, 20) *Talibés* are also trafficked from Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Senegal to Mauritania for forced begging.(20, 24) Girls are trafficked from Senegal and Mali for domestic service in Mauritania.(20) During the reporting period, there were reports of girls between ages 5 and 13 being trafficked from Mauritania to the Persian Gulf under the guise of marriage, but end up being commercially sexually exploited.(4, 13)

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.(25-27) Research indicates that a lack of school infrastructure and limited availability of teachers impedes access to education, which also increases the risk of children engaging in the worst forms of child labor.(9, 23)

## Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14.(28, 29) 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 maintain their schooling.(28) According to the Labor Code, children younger than age 14 are prohibited from night work.(28) The Labor Code also bans children younger than age 18 from work that is dangerous; beyond their strength; or likely to harm their safety, health or morals.(30) All laws regarding regular work also apply to apprenticeships.(31) However, the

Government lacks a hazardous labor list, which would specify the activities that are considered hazardous for children.(4, 32)

	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	15
	Free Public Education	Yes

In September 2011, the Ministry of Labor adopted regulation No. 1797 of the Labor Code Law 2004-017 to regulate domestic work, by establishing minimum conditions of work, contracts, leave time, and access to social security for servants and child care providers, in line with ILO Convention 189. However, even with the new regulation, the Labor Code Law 2004-017 does not provide a minimum age for work or prohibit hazardous work for children under age 18 engaged in domestic labor.(4, 23) In addition, the Labor Code does not protect children engaged in work on the streets.(4)

According to the law, the Government has established the right to free primary education until the age of 15. However, in practice, the free education provision is not effectively enforced, as children must pay for school-related expenses (such as school fees).(3, 7)

The Penal Protection Code for Children establishes penalties for sexually exploiting a child and for inciting a child to beg or giving authority to another person to do so.(33) The law also prohibits the production of child pornography.(9) However, the law does not prohibit the use of children in other illicit activities, such as selling drugs.(13, 34)

Laws 2007-048 and 025/3003 prohibit forced and compulsory labor, as well as slavery and trafficking in persons.(34-36) The 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.(13) The minimum age for both voluntary and compulsory recruitment into the military is 18.(37) At the time of writing, it is unclear if the Government has a law to protect children against forced recruitment in armed conflict that would include recruitment by non-state parties.

### **Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement**

The multi-stakeholder Child Trafficking, Smuggling and Labor Group is composed of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Children (MSFC); the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Interior; the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society; NGOs; and international organizations. The Group met seven times in 2011, to coordinate child labor and child trafficking efforts.(4, 20) However, the Group did not effectively coordinate activities during the reporting period.(3, 4)

The MSFC has primary responsibility for both child labor policy and enforcing all child labor laws, including those related to the worst forms of child labor.(3, 4) The MSFC is also responsible for developing, elaborating and executing programs to protect vulnerable children.(4) The Government of Mauritania has 60 labor inspectors who are responsible for following up on child labor violations.(3, 4, 9) During the year, new labor inspectors were provided with training at the National School of Administration and attended a workshop, which will enable them to train other inspectors.(4, 38) However, the training provided did not include “in-service” training on child labor issues, and no child labor inspections or investigations were performed by the Government during the reporting period. Furthermore, the Government did not make labor inspection data accessible to the public.(3, 4) In 2011, the Government budgeted \$1.4 million for the MSFC, of which only \$35,700 was designated for child protection. However, there was no budget for labor inspections.(4)

The Direction of the Judiciary Protection of Children under the Ministry of Justice, the Commissariat for Human Rights and the Special Brigade for Minors under the Ministry of the Interior also undertake activities that protect children and enforce laws, including the worst forms of child labor.(3, 4) Research suggests, however, that the Government does not have a mechanism to refer children to social and other services.(4)

The Government reports that no complaints were filed during the year. NGOs took the child slavery cases (discussed below) directly to court and no formal complaints were filed.(4) Research indicates that the Government preferred to take the cases directly to court, as it was perceived as the quicker and

more amicable way to resolve the cases.(23) In addition, the Government did not make such prosecution data accessible to the public.

During the reporting period, the Government secured five convictions involving one case of child slavery. The case involved conviction of four members from a single family, for enslaving two children.(4) The slave master was sentenced to 2 years in prison and ordered to pay \$4,900 in damages to the slave children; the other three family members received 2-year suspended sentences for “complicity;” and the mother of the two child slaves received a 1-year suspended sentence for “complicity.”(4) An additional case involving three child victims and nine adult perpetrators was prosecuted, but all were acquitted. During the year, some reports indicate that the Government had detained some anti-slavery protestors.(13, 39)

### **Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor**

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Family and Children has a national strategy and 3-year plan of action (2009-2012) for the protection of children.(40) The strategy and action plan aim to strengthen the legal system, increase access to social services for vulnerable children and establish a system to coordinate, and monitor and evaluate service provision.(41) 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.(17, 34) 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.(17, 42)

The Government of Mauritania has other policies, such as the PRSP 2011-2015, which includes plans to increase access to quality education for all children.(43, 44) The Government has a UN Assistance Development Framework (2009-2010) that aims to provide social and educational assistance to vulnerable and exploited children.(45) The Government of Mauritania also has a National Program for the Development of the Education Sector (2001-2010), which aims to increase children’s access to education, particularly among girls.(34) The question of whether the child protection, poverty reduction, education and other policies have had an impact on child labor does not appear to have been addressed.

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

The Government of Mauritania acknowledges that child labor and forced labor is a problem. However, the UN reports that

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despite the convictions during the year, more needs to be done to address the problem of slave practices in Mauritania.(4, 46)

During the reporting period, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees continued to repatriate and reunite Western Sahara refugees (including children) in Senegal and Mali with their families in Mauritania, though the Government announced the end of the program in March 2012.(47, 48) The Mauritanian refugees had been displaced by ethnic clashes in 1989, and in 2008, some 19,000 refugees had been repatriated before operations were forced to cease due to civil and political unrest.(49) The Government of Mauritania continued to provide refugee children with education and other services to ensure that they were protected and did not fall into the worst forms of child labor.(31)

The Government of Mauritania continued to participate in the EU-funded UNODC Impact Program that aims to assist West and North African States in implementing the Migrant Smuggling Protocol. The IMPACT Project aims to strengthen criminal justice systems by improving legislative frameworks, building government capacity, improving data collection and analysis techniques and raising awareness.(50, 51) Under the Project, 12 traditional mediators from remote areas where a formal justice system is absent were trained on the national legal framework.(52) During the year, the Government also participated in an \$18 million project funded by the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development that aims to assist rural communities through provision of loans and grants to improve livelihoods, economic opportunities and food security. The project targets an estimated 21,000 households.(53) The question of whether these education, social protection and livelihoods programs have had an impact on child labor has not been addressed.

The Government of Mauritania continued to participate in a \$500,000 USAID-funded, UNICEF-implemented 2-year project to provide support to children engaged in slavery in domestic service, commercial sexual exploitation and forced

begging (*talibés*), among other sectors.(4, 9, 54) The project is scheduled to run through September 2012.(54, 55) It aims to strengthen legal frameworks and provide income-generating opportunities to victims of slavery, targeting women and children.(3, 9) The evaluation report notes that the project continues to suffer from implementation delays. The delays are in large part due to challenges with procuring beneficiary identity documents under the Government's national registration system.(4)

During the reporting period, the Government and UNICEF also entered into a partnership with the Religious Leaders Network for Child Rights and Imams to combat violence against children, including forced begging. Also during the reporting period, the Government and UNICEF distributed 2,000 awareness raising leaflets on the dangers of violence against children.(56) Reports suggest that the Government of Mauritania, with support from the United Arab Emirates and UNICEF, continued to provide social and other services to children that had been trafficked for labor in the camel jockeying sector in the UAE, in previous years.(48)

Since 2007, the Government has operated Centers for the Protection (CPISEs) and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations 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*. However, the centers are not fully funded and, therefore, are not fully functional. The centers do not provide sufficient services to the number of child victims that need them.(3, 4, 9, 23) The multi-stakeholder Child Trafficking, Smuggling and Labor Group held a workshop for Government personnel on child labor and forced labor laws.(4, 13)

In addition, research indicates that the scope of the programs to assist children involved in agriculture, herding, domestic service, the informal sector, street work and indentured servitude are not sufficient to meet the total need.(3, 4)

## 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	Amend the labor code to include protections for children engaged in work on the street and in domestic labor.	2011
	Draft and adopt a hazardous labor list in accordance with international standards.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Draft and adopt a law that prohibits the use of children in illicit activities.	2009, 2010, 2011



Area	Suggested Actions	Year(s) Action Recommended
Coordination and Enforcement	Improve coordination efforts of the Child Trafficking, Smuggling and Labor Group.	2011
	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
	Establish and implement a mechanism for referring children to social services.	2011
	Provide sufficient funding, human resources and personnel training for effective coordination, inspection and enforcement efforts.	2010, 2011
	Make data regarding inspections, investigations, complaints and prosecutions accessible to the public.	2011
	Effectively enforce free public education legal provisions.	2010, 2011
	Take steps to ensure that worst forms of child labor and anti-slavery protestors are not unlawfully detained.	2011
Policies	Fully fund and redouble efforts to implement policies that protect children and collect data to identify children in need of these services.	2010, 2011
	Assess the impact that existing policies may have on addressing the worst forms of child labor.	2009, 2010, 2011
Social Programs	Expand the scope of programs to address the worst forms of child labor in agriculture, domestic service, informal sectors and other sectors in which children work, as well as children in hereditary and indentured servitude.	2009, 2010, 2011
	Fully fund the four Centers for the Protection of Children in Difficulty.	2011
	Establish and implement a program to address lack of schools that impedes child access to education.	2011
	Step up efforts to develop and implement programs to lessen the impact food shortages may have on rural populations.	2011
	Assess and evaluate the impact that existing education, social protection and livelihoods programs may have on addressing child labor.	2011

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