

In 2013, Mauritania made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Government created the National Agency for the Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty, which aims to tackle poverty, promote the integration of refugees, and rehabilitate former slaves. The Government also adopted the UN anti-slavery “roadmap” and approved Law No. 2013-011, which designates the crimes of slavery and torture as “crimes against humanity,” and removes the statute of limitations. However, children in Mauritania continue to engage in child labor in agriculture and herding, and in the worst forms of child labor in indentured and hereditary servitude. Mauritania’s legal framework lacks a list of hazardous occupations prohibited for children, does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, and does not provide protection for children working without a contract. 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 in agriculture and herding and in the worst forms of child labor in indentured and hereditary servitude. (1-4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in Mauritania. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

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, 2014.(5)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children’s Work Project’s analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3, 2007.(6)

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* (7-12)
	Herding and caring for cattle, goats, sheep,*and camels* (2, 4, 12-14)
	Fishing,* activities unknown (4, 8-12, 15-18)
Industry	Crushing gravel* for construction sites (18)
Services	Domestic service† (4, 8, 9, 13, 18-24)
	Work as car mechanics and painters (8, 10, 11, 15, 17)
	Garbage scavenging (8, 10, 11, 15)
	Street work, including as market vendors, shoe shiners, and in the transportation sector (4, 8, 10, 15, 16, 18, 25)

Mauritania

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Sector/Industry	Activity
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Forced begging,† as a result of criminal gang recruitment and by Koranic teachers (10-12, 18, 26-28)
	Commercial sexual exploitation sometimes as a result of human trafficking (8, 9, 15)
	Selling drugs (8, 10, 12, 16, 29)
	Indentured and hereditary servitude (14, 29-33)
	Domestic service sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4, 8, 32)

* 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.(14, 29-33) 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.(12, 34, 35) Some child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor.(2, 12, 14, 32, 34) Those who attempt to escape are killed.(14, 29) 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.(12)




In Mauritania, it is a traditional practice to send children to Koranic teachers to receive an education. However, some Koranic teachers, or *marabouts*, force their students, or *talibés*, to beg for more than 12 hours a day without adequate food or shelter.(11, 12, 19, 27, 32)

Research suggests that a 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.(35-37) Many children in Mauritania are also not registered at birth. Unable to prove citizenship, unregistered children may have difficulty accessing services such as education.(32, 38, 39) Additionally, Mauritania hosted approximately 74,000 Malian refugees in 2013. 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) Further, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF), in collaboration with the UN Children’s Fund, continued work on its study, “Child Trafficking and the Worst Forms of Labor in Mauritania,” but it has yet to publish the results.(18)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON 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 relevant laws and regulations related to child labor (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)
List of Hazardous Occupations Prohibited for Children	No		
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 1 of Law 2007-048; Law 025/3003; Law 2013-011(43-47)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 1 and 3 of Law 025/3003 (45)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 24, 25, and 26 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (Ordinance 2005-015) (36, 48)
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 43 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (Ordinance 2005-015) (47, 48)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	14	Law 2001-054 (49, 50)
Free Public Education	Yes		Law 2001-054 (49)

* No conscription or no standing military.

Mauritanian law is not completely consistent with international standards regarding child labor. The Government lacks a hazardous occupations list that specifies activities considered hazardous for children.(7, 51) However, Law No 1797 prohibits the employment of children in domestic service, and the Penal Protection Code for Children prohibits employing and provoking children to beg.(47, 48, 52) Children working in non-contractual work do not have the same protections under child labor laws and regulations as children working in contractual employment.(7, 42, 53) The law does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, such as selling drugs.(29, 37, 43)

In 2013, the Government approved Law No. 2013-011, which designates the crimes of slavery and torture as “crimes against humanity” (thereby amending Article 13 of the Constitution) and removes the statute of limitations. This is an improvement from the 2007 law’s 10-year statute of limitations.(32, 46, 47) Although the Government partnered with local NGOs, UNICEF, and Terre des Hommes to draft a law against the worst forms of child labor, it has not enacted this legislation.(18)

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.(18)
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.(18)
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.(47)
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.(11)
Ministry of the Interior’s Special Brigade for Minors	Investigate crimes against children, including 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.(27, 47)
National Police Force	Investigate crimes against children.(47)

Mauritania

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to combat child labor, including its worst forms. However, research found no evidence that labor law enforcement agencies took such actions.

Labor Law Enforcement

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Labor's Labor and Inspection Office employed 80 labor inspectors.(18) However, the labor inspectorate lacks staff members and resources to carry out its mandate.(37, 54) In 2013, there was no budget for labor inspections.(18) However, 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.(18) During the year, labor inspectors did not receive training on child labor issues.(18) Further, the Government did not make labor inspection data accessible to the public, including the number of inspections performed, violations found, citations issued, and the severity of penalties applied.(18) MASEF's Office of Childhood refers victims of child labor to Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations (CPISEs).(47)

According to Law No. 2001-054, the Government has established compulsory primary education. However, in practice, the compulsory education provision is not enforced effectively, as many children do not attend school.(2, 12, 49, 50)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In collaboration with NGOs, the Special Brigade for Minors identified 4,372 girls working as domestic servants from September 2011 to November 2013.(18) Although the Brigade refers children to social and other services, including CPISEs, it is unclear whether the previously mentioned domestic servants received such assistance.(18) During the year, a source indicates that the police and officers in the Special Brigade for Minors tortured children to make them confess to crimes.(55)

During the reporting period, the Government investigated two cases of slavery involving children. However, in both cases, the police released the accused from custody, and there were no follow-up prosecutions.(33, 56) In 2013, the Government announced the creation of a court designed specifically to address slavery cases. No additional information is available about this court.(28) Research did not uncover the number of investigators responsible for enforcing criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor or whether they were provided with training. Research also did not uncover information about the number of prosecutions, convictions, or whether appropriate penalties were applied related to the criminal enforcement of labor laws.

In 2013, the Government announced the creation of the National Agency for the Fight against the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and the Fight against Poverty, known as "Tadamoun." This agency reports directly to the President and aims to tackle poverty, promote the integration of refugees, and rehabilitate former slaves by providing them with shelter, food, and job training.(32, 33, 47, 57-59) Tadamoun can also file complaints on behalf of citizens who accuse their employers of practicing slavery, and bring cases of alleged slavery to the authorities for investigation.(60) During the reporting period, Tadamoun's budget was \$14.9 million. Research could not find out whether Tadamoun carried out any activities in 2013 aimed specifically at combating child labor.(47, 61)

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.(2, 18)

The Child Trafficking, Smuggling, and Labor Group met once during the reporting period.(18) It also held a workshop in January 2013 to present the draft law against the worst forms of child labor to government agencies.(2)

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 (2008)	Aims to prevent slavery through improvements in education, health, and by providing victims with income-generating activities. Implemented by Tadamoun and includes a budget of over \$3 million.(33, 47, 62) Research did not find evidence that Tadamoun implemented the National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery in 2013.(47)
UN Anti-Slavery Roadmap (2014)†	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.(63-65) Based on recommendations made by the UN's Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery after an official mission to Mauritania.(63-65)
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.(66)
Strategic Framework to Fight Poverty (2011–2015)	Aims to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, provide quality education to vulnerable children, and protect the rights of children.(67)
National Strategy for the Protection of Children in Mauritania and Action Plan (2009–2013)*	Aims to increase access to social services for vulnerable children and establish a system to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate service provision for children.(68-70)
PRSP II (2011–2015)	Seeks to eliminate child labor and includes plans to increase access to quality education for all children.(71, 72)
UN Assistance Development Framework (2012–2016)*	Provides educational assistance to vulnerable and exploited children.(73)

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

† Policy was launched during the reporting period.

Although the Government of Mauritania has adopted the National Plan to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor.(62) The Government of Mauritania lacks reliable data to be able to provide services to all victims of slavery or those at risk.(62)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

In 2013, the Government of Mauritania funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing 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 provided an NGO with \$15,000 to support five former slaves in 2013.(32)
Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children in Difficult Situations (CPISE)‡	Government program that provides food, shelter, education, and training to vulnerable children, many of whom are <i>talibés</i> . In 2013, the Government opened a new CPISE in Rosso and operates four other CPISEs in Kiffa, Nouadhibou, and the El Mina and Dar-Naim regions of Nouakchott.(1, 2, 18, 35) The Government allocated \$116,667, which served 130 children during the reporting period.(18)
Child Protection Training Center‡	Government program that provides training on child protection to local organizations, including child labor, in the town of Selibaby.(2)
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.(74, 75)
Poverty Reduction Project*	Approximately \$38.4 million UN International Fund for Agricultural Development–funded project in Aftout South and Karakoro.(76) 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.(77)

Mauritania

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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

Program	Description
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.(36)
Youth Employment Programs*	Ministry of Labor program, with support from ILO, that trained 41 job counsellors on how to assist youth in finding decent work.(78)

* 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 address the extent of the problem fully.(2) The Government's continued detention of anti-slavery protestors in 2013 and the lack of recent data on slavery hampers its ability to address this issue comprehensively and develop programs for future initiatives.(29, 79-81) Further, as recently as July 2013, some government officials, including the Director General of Tadamoun, did not acknowledge that slavery continues despite its prohibition.(59) 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.(82, 83)

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
Laws	Draft and adopt a hazardous occupations list in accordance with international standards.	2009 – 2013
	Ensure that relevant child labor laws and regulations apply equally to children working in non-contractual and contractual employment.	2012 – 2013
	Draft and adopt a law that prohibits the use of children in illicit activities.	2009 – 2013
	Adopt the law on the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2013
Enforcement	Provide sufficient funding, human resources, and personnel training for effective inspection and enforcement efforts.	2010 – 2013
	Ensure that the police and Special Brigade for Minors are trained on children's rights and immediately cease the use of torture to coerce confessions.	2013
	Make data regarding inspections, investigations, complaints, prosecutions, and penalties accessible to the public.	2011 – 2013
	Effectively enforce compulsory education legal provisions.	2010 – 2013
	Make publicly available information on the number of investigators responsible for enforcing criminal laws on the worst forms of child labor and whether they receive training.	2013
	Take steps to ensure that anti-slavery protestors are not unlawfully detained.	2011 – 2013
	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as dangerous work in agriculture and herding.	2013
Government Policies	Assess the impact that existing policies may have on addressing the worst forms of child labor.	2009 – 2013
	Make publicly available the survey on child trafficking and the worst forms of child labor in Mauritania.	2012 – 2013
	Collect data on slavery to identify children in need of these services.	2010 – 2013
Social Programs	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 – 2013

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

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Implement a continuous awareness-raising campaign in urban and rural areas on worst forms of child labor laws and for government officials on slavery.	2012 – 2013
	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 – 2013
	Assess and evaluate the impact that existing social programs may have on addressing child labor.	2011 – 2013

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Mauritania

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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