



# MAURITANIA

## MINIMAL ADVANCEMENT – Efforts Made but Continued Law that Delayed Advancement

In 2023, Mauritania made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government enacted the National Action Plan for the Elimination of Child Labor for 2023–2027, which aims to mainstream the implementation of existing legal frameworks and establish institutional mechanisms to address child labor. The government also held a series of trainings for both labor inspectors and local communities about its hazardous work list. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Mauritania is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because its Civil Status Code requires a copy of the biological parents’ marriage license for children to obtain a birth certificate. As a result, children born out of wedlock and many Haratine and Sub-Saharan ethnic minority children, including those of slave descent, have been prevented from being registered at birth. Because birth certificates are required for enrollment in secondary school in Mauritania, children as young as age 12 cannot access education, making them more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. Research is also needed on the prevalence of child labor in the country, and social programs are insufficient to adequately address the extent of the problem. In addition, the government did not publish comprehensive information about its labor law enforcement efforts.



## PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

### Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent of Population
Working	5 to 14	19.7% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	68.3%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	15.8%

Children in Mauritania are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary slavery. Children also perform dangerous tasks in agriculture, particularly in herding cattle and goats.

### Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity



#### Agriculture

Herding† and caring for livestock, including cattle and goats. Fishing, including accompanying fishermen on boats† and selling fish.



#### Industry

Construction†.



#### Services

Domestic work† and working as car mechanics,† painters, and carpenters†. Garbage scavenging and street work, including vending, begging,† and in the transportation sector.



#### Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Domestic servitude and indentured and hereditary slavery. Forced begging, sometimes as a result of criminal gang recruitment and coercion by Koranic teachers. Commercial sexual exploitation and used in illicit activities, including the production and transportation of drugs, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking.

† 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.



## SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in Mauritania's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

## Legal Framework

Accede to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.

Specify the activities in which light work may be permitted.

Increase the compulsory education age from 14 to 16 to align with the minimum age for work.

## Enforcement

Publish complete information on labor law enforcement efforts, including the number of child labor violations found, the number of child labor violations for which penalties were imposed, the number of child labor penalties imposed that were collected, and whether routine inspections were targeted.

Carry out inspections in the informal sector, and impose penalties for child labor violations, including violations for the worst forms of child labor.

Increase training, including on circular 104-2021, staffing, and financial resources for labor and criminal law enforcement agencies, including the anti-slavery courts, to adequately enforce labor laws, especially in remote areas and in the informal sector.

Increase efforts to ensure that cases of the worst forms of child labor, including hereditary slavery and forced begging, are fully investigated, brought to court, and prosecuted in accordance with the law.

Ensure judicial officials use the pre-trial detention process and leverage extradition agreements with neighboring countries to ensure perpetrators of slavery cases are held accountable.

Ensure that judicial officials can properly identify cases of slavery and trafficking and that they do not improperly dismiss or fail to refer appropriate cases to the anti-slavery courts.

Take appropriate corrective action to hold accountable any government officials who do not properly enforce, or who prevent the enforcement of laws related to the worst forms of child labor, including hereditary slavery.

## Government Policies

Ensure that key policies related to child labor receive sufficient resources, including funds, for effective implementation.

Ensure activities are undertaken to implement the National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor, National Child Protection Strategy, and the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development and publish results from activities implemented on an annual basis.

## Social Programs

Continue civil registration campaigns around the country and ensure that all children are able to obtain birth certificates, especially those born out of wedlock and to the Haratine and other ethnic groups, to increase their access to secondary education and reduce their vulnerability to child labor.

Ensure ongoing reforms to expand public education include enough schools and teachers, in order to provide every child with access to education.

Ensure that activities are undertaken to implement the Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery, Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family programs, and Model *Mahadras* to address child labor during the reporting period and make information about implementation measures publicly available.

Expand the scope of programs to address child labor, including in agriculture, herding, domestic work, and hereditary and indentured slavery.

Conduct research and collect data on hereditary slavery and child labor to inform the development of effective policies and programs to identify and protect children who are at risk.

Increase funding dedicated to improving school infrastructure and teacher availability, especially in rural areas, to eliminate barriers to and make education accessible for all children, including those from families of enslaved descent, refugees, and ethnic minorities.



## CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Children in Mauritania, especially from the marginalized Haratine ethnic minority, continue to be exploited and forced to endure in slavery and slavery-like practices, particularly in rural and remote areas of the country. Some children are born into the illegal practice of hereditary slavery; 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. Enslaved children herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor. Young girls, from families disproportionately impacted by poverty, including the Haratine, Wolof, Halpulaar, and Soninké communities, are sometimes forced to work as domestic servants in Mauritania's urban areas. There is also a large number of refugees in Mauritania, primarily from Mali. Refugee children face heightened risks of child labor due to their displacement.



## BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

The 2011-003 Civil Status Code requires a copy of the biological parents' marriage license for children to obtain a birth certificate. As a result, children born out of wedlock and many Haratine and Sub-Saharan ethnic minority children, including those of enslaved descent, have been prevented from being registered at birth. While students no longer need to possess birth certificates to take part in national examinations to obtain the Certificate of Primary Education Studies, birth certificates are still required to take exams necessary to enroll in secondary school. As a result, many children as young as age 12 cannot access secondary education, making them more vulnerable to child labor. Moreover, although all families are required to register children for birth certificates, research found that the civil registration process, which includes obtaining birth certificates, is confusing and time consuming.

Mauritania's Education Reform Law was enacted in 2022, and it transitioned all students to public schools and ended private education. However, the reforms unintentionally created a new barrier to education access by creating an overwhelming demand for public education, and a structural scarcity of adequate public-school buildings, teachers, and textbooks, especially given that many school buildings continued to be used as emergency shelters after flooding events. The lack of school infrastructure and limited availability of teachers in rural areas also impedes access to education, which may increase children's vulnerability to child labor. In addition, children from families of enslaved descent, especially from the Haratine ethnic minority, face barriers to accessing education due to ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, refugee children may have difficulty obtaining birth certificates or finding available classrooms, which makes them particularly vulnerable to child labor.











## LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Mauritania has not ratified key international conventions concerning child labor, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict. In addition, children ages 14 through 16 are vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but are not legally allowed to work.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, <b>16 Years</b>		Article 76 of the General Child Protection Code
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 76 of the General Child Protection Code; Article 247 of the Labor Code
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		Articles 76 and 77 of the General Child Protection Code; Article 4 of the List of Hazardous Work Forbidden to Children

### Legal Framework for Child Labor (Cont.)

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		Articles 1, 3, and 4 of the 2003 Anti-Trafficking Law; Article 1 and 2 of the 2013 Law Against Slavery and Torture Crimes; the 2015 Bill modifying the Anti-Slavery Law; Article 54 of the Penal Protection Code for Children
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		Articles 1 and 3 of the 2003 Anti-Trafficking Law; Article 54 of the Penal Protection Code for Children; Articles 2 and 4 of the 2020 Law Regarding the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Victim Protection; Articles 18, 43, and 67 of the 2020 Law Regarding the Fight Against Migrant Trafficking
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		Articles 72 and 76 of the General Child Protection Code; Article 1 of the 2003 Anti-Trafficking Law; Articles 24–26 of the Penal Protection Code for Children; Article 2 of the 2020 Law Regarding the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Victim Protection
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		Articles 3–5 and 14 of Law 93-37 on the Prohibition of Production, Trafficking, and Use of Drugs and Illicit Substances
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment, <b>18 Years</b>		Article 7 of the 1962 Military Recruitment Law
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	<b>N/A*</b>	
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		Article 43 of the Penal Protection Code for Children
Compulsory Education Age, <b>14 Years</b>		Article 1 of the Basic Education Law
Free Public Education		Article 1 of the Basic Education Law

\* Country has no conscription

The Labor Code allows children ages 12 and older to perform light work as long as it does not impede their school attendance, does not exceed 2 hours per day, and is authorized by the Ministry of Labor. However, the Labor Code does not specify the activities in which light work may be permitted. In addition, children in Mauritania are required to attend school only up to age 14. This leaves children ages 14 through 16 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but are not legally allowed to work.



### ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to address child labor. However, the lack of financial resources hindered enforcement efforts.

## Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

**Ministry of Labor and Professional Education’s Directorate of Labor and Inspection (MFTPMA):** Enforces labor laws and investigates labor code infractions, including violations related to minimum wage and hazardous work. In 2023, the Ministry held meetings with labor unions, employers, civil society organizations, as well as UNICEF and the ILO to raise awareness about child labor laws.

**Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Justice:** The Ministry of the Interior’s (MOI) Special Brigade for Minors investigates crimes against children, including human trafficking, and monitors religious schools (*mahadras*) to ensure that children are not forced to beg on behalf of their teachers. Research was unable to determine whether the Special Brigade for Minors was active during the reporting period. Also part of the MOI, the National Agency for Population Registration (ANRPTS) registered over 600,000 people between July 2023 and February 2024. However, research indicates that thousands were unable to register with the agency, particularly members of minority groups such as the Haratine. The Ministry of Justice’s Anti-Slavery Courts prosecute crimes related to slavery, and provide free legal assistance to survivors, including children. While the government has increased resources to the Courts, research indicates that continued financial support is necessary for the anti-slavery courts to function effectively. During the reporting period, the Anti-Slavery Courts prosecuted several cases involving children.

## Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes	Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Unknown
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes	Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes	Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes

In 2023, **128** labor inspectors conducted **620** worksite inspections, finding an **unknown** number of child labor violations. In addition, the government also conducted **7** investigations into suspected cases of the worst forms of child labor, initiated an **unknown** number of prosecutions, with **9** perpetrators convicted.



## COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

### Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Mauritania has established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. However, it is unclear whether the Commissariat for Human Rights was active during the reporting period.

**Commissariat on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society Relations:** Coordinates the development and implementation of government policies related to human rights, including those related to the worst forms of child labor. Carries out awareness-raising campaigns to combat slavery and human trafficking, and acts as a semi-autonomous body under the supervision of the Office of the Prime Minister, which is also a member of the Human Rights Inter-Ministerial Committee. Holds the power to act as a civil party on behalf of victims of slavery. Conducted several nationwide campaigns to raise awareness about hereditary slavery and its vestiges during the reporting period.

**Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)**

<p><b>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</b></p> <p>Mauritania established policies related to child labor. However, it is unclear whether all of the policies were implemented during the reporting period.</p> <p><i>† Policy was approved during the reporting period.</i></p>	<p><b>National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor 2023–2027 (PANETE-RIM II):</b><i>†</i> Launched in February of 2023, aims to address forced child labor, forced child begging, commercial sexual exploitation, slavery, and other forms of child exploitation. Overseen by the Commissariat on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society Relations.</p> <p><b>National Child Protection Strategy (2020–2025):</b> Aims to protect children against violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. Specifically includes children exploited at work, child survivors of human trafficking, children living on the streets, and children who are survivors of violence or sexual exploitation. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Child Protection Strategy during the reporting period.</p> <p><b>Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development (2016–2030):</b> Overseen by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development, aims to increase birth registration and access to compulsory education, strengthen social protection systems for children, and support efforts to combat slavery, including its vestiges. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development during the reporting period.</p>
<p><b>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</b></p> <p>Mauritania funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs are inadequate to address child labor in all sectors, including agriculture, domestic work, and for children in hereditary and indentured slavery.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of Mauritania.</i></p>	<p><b>Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery:</b><i>†</i> Government program functioning under the <i>Taazour</i> Administration that supports the reintegration and rehabilitation of former slaves. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery during the reporting period.</p> <p><b>Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF) Office of Childhood Programs:</b><i>†</i> Government programs to protect vulnerable children, including victims of the worst forms of child labor. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF) Office of Childhood Programs during the reporting period.</p> <p><b>Model Mahadras Program:</b><i>†</i> Ministry of Islamic Affairs-funded program that provides monthly cash transfers of approximately \$27 to parents whose children are enrolled in Model <i>Mahadras</i>. Also operates adult literacy classes for 8,000 religious leaders (<i>imam</i>)s across Mauritania to raise awareness of children's rights, including information on child labor and child trafficking. Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the Model <i>Mahadras</i> Program during the reporting period.</p>

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit [dol.gov/ILABprojects](https://dol.gov/ILABprojects)  
 For references, please visit [dol.gov/ChildLaborReports](https://dol.gov/ChildLaborReports)