

Mauritania

The Government developed a national strategy and a 3-year plan of action for the protection of children. However, the Government does not enforce child labor laws and its social programs do not sufficiently address the needs of vulnerable children. As a result, children continue to engage in the worst forms of child labor in agriculture, as well as indentured servitude in remote areas of the country.

Statistics on Working Children and School Attendance

Children	Percent
Working	Unavailable
Attending School	Unavailable
Combining Work and School	Unavailable



Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Children in Mauritania are exploited in the worst forms of child labor,³²²⁹ many of them in agriculture. In rural areas, children commonly perform activities such as farming (e.g., rice, beans, and vegetables), where they are exposed to carrying heavy loads and dangerous tools and chemicals.³²³⁰ Children herd and care for animals (e.g., goats) and risk injury and exposure to diseases from animals. In addition, children work in the fishing sector, where they are at risk of injury and drowning. Some children also burn wood to produce charcoal and risk injury due to burns.³²³¹

In cities such as Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, Kiffa, and Rosso, children are engaged in the worst forms of child labor in the informal sector, including activities such as street vending, garbage collection, delivery of various goods, transporting people via donkey carts, and apprenticeships to mechanics.³²³² Mostly boys engage in these activities, and many work more than 8 hours a day, 6 days a week and are subject to carrying heavy loads and handling toxic materials.³²³³ Some apprentices are beaten and forced to work for many years by their master.³²³⁴

Some male street children are former Koranic students, or *talibes*.³²³⁵ Traditionally, families send boys to Koranic teachers to receive education, which should involve work or an apprenticeship. However, some Koranic teachers, or *marabouts*, force *talibes* to beg for more than 12 hours a day without adequate food or shelter.³²³⁶ Most *talibes* in Mauritania are between the ages of 6 and 10 and come from the Pulaar tribes in the southern part of the country.³²³⁷

Girls, many of whom are between the ages of 7 and 12, may work as domestic servants in urban households for 6 to 10 hours a day. Many work without pay and some are beaten and sexually abused.³²³⁸ Many domestic servants in Mauritania come from the Senegal River Valley and Assaba and work in Nouakchott.³²³⁹

In Mauritania, children continue to be exploited in indentured servitude and slave-like practices in remote areas of the country, including places where the economy persists on traditional labor and barter arrangements.³²⁴⁰ These children are used in activities such as animal husbandry and herding (e.g., with goats, camels, and other animals).³²⁴¹

Mauritania is a source and destination country for trafficked children.³²⁴² Reports indicate that children

are trafficked within Mauritania for forced labor in agriculture, construction, herding, domestic labor, and fishing.³²⁴³ In addition, children are trafficked by street gang leaders for selling drugs and stealing—girls for domestic labor and sexual exploitation, boys for camel jockeying, and *talibes* for forced begging.³²⁴⁴ However, more recently, there have not been reports of trafficking of boys for camel jockeying.³²⁴⁵ *Talibes* are trafficked from Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau to Mauritania for forced begging.³²⁴⁶ Girls are trafficked from Senegal and Mali for domestic service.³²⁴⁷

Laws and Regulations on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

The Labor Code sets the minimum age for employment at 14. However, if a child has not completed the required 9 years of education, the child may be restricted from employment until such education is complete.³²⁴⁸ At age 12, children may perform light work in establishments where their family members are employed, provided that they have

	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

the Ministry of Labor's authorization and maintain their schooling.³²⁴⁹ According to the Labor Code, children under age 16 are prohibited from night work.³²⁵⁰ The Labor Code also bans children under age 18 from work that is dangerous, beyond their strength

or is likely to harm their safety, health, or morals.³²⁵¹ However, the Government lacks a hazardous labor list.

The Penal Protection Code for Children establishes penalties for the sexual exploitation of a child.³²⁵² The Penal Protection Code for Children also states that inciting a child to beg, or giving authority to another person to do so, is punishable.³²⁵³ However, the law does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities.

Law 2007-048 and Law 025/3003 prohibits forced and compulsory labor, as well as slavery and trafficking in persons.³²⁵⁴ The minimum age for both voluntary and compulsory recruitment into the military is 18.³²⁵⁵

Institutional Mechanisms for Coordination and Enforcement

Research found no evidence that the Government of Mauritania has established a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Family, and Children has primary responsibility for both child labor policy and enforcement of all child labor laws, including the worst forms of child labor.³²⁵⁶

The Government of Mauritania has 60 labor inspectors who are responsible for following up on child labor violations.³²⁵⁷ During the reporting period, the Government did not undertake any investigations, prosecutions, convictions, or sentences related to the worst forms of child labor.³²⁵⁸

The Direction of the Judiciary Protection of Children under the Ministry of Justice 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.³²⁵⁹ Information on enforcement activities were not identified through research.

Government Policies on the Worst Forms of Child Labor

With funding and technical support from UNICEF, the National Children's Council of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Family, and Children established a national strategy and 3-year plan of action (2009-2011) for the protection of children.³²⁶⁰ 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, monitor, and evaluate service provision.³²⁶¹ In addition, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2006-2010) includes plans to increase access to quality education for all children.³²⁶² The question of whether these policies have an impact on the worst forms of child labor does not appear to have been addressed.

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

During the reporting period, the Government continued to provide support, such as technical support by government officials, to a center for vulnerable children located in Noaukchott. It provided

shelter for 270 children in 2009, many of whom were *talibes*.³²⁶³ The Government also participated in awareness-raising campaigns on child domestic labor.³²⁶⁴ Additionally, it continued to participate in a regional project funded by the United Arab Emirates that seeks to return child camel jockeys to their home countries, and to reintegrate them into acceptable childhood activities.³²⁶⁵

Although the Government has participated in programs for vulnerable children and child jockeys, research found limited evidence that it has carried out programs to assist children involved in agriculture, domestic service, the informal sector, street work, or children in indentured servitude.

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

IN THE AREA OF LAWS AND REGULATIONS:

- Draft and adopt a hazardous labor list, in accordance with international standards.
- Draft and adopt a law that prohibits the use of children in illicit activities, in accordance with international standards.

IN THE AREA OF COORDINATION AND ENFORCEMENT:

- Establish a coordinating mechanism to combat the worst forms of child labor.
- Take all necessary measures to effectively enforce child labor and anti-trafficking laws, including investigation, prosecution, and conviction of individuals.

IN THE AREA OF POLICIES:

- Assess the impact that existing policies may have on addressing the worst forms of child labor.

IN THE AREA OF PROGRAMS:

- Institute programs to address the worst forms of child labor in agriculture, domestic service, informal sectors, and other sectors where children work, as well as children in indentured servitude.

³²²⁹ Data provided in the chart at the beginning of this country report are not available from the data sources that are used by USDOL. Reliable data on the worst forms of child labor are especially difficult to collect given the often hidden or illegal nature of the worst forms. For more information on sources used for these statistics, the definition of working children, and other indicators used in this report, please see the “Children’s Work and Education Statistics: Sources and Definitions” section.

³²³⁰ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting*, February 11, 2010, para 3. See also Haimoud Ramdan, *La lutte contre la Précarité des Enfants en Mauritanie*, Université de Nouakchott, 17. See also Le Quotidien de Nouakchott official, Interview with USDOL consultant, May 15, 2008, 65.

³²³¹ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, February 11, 2010*, para 3. See also Ramdan, *La lutte contre la Précarité des Enfants*, 17. See also Le Quotidien de Nouakchott official, Interview, May 15, 2008, 65.

³²³² Bechir Fall, *Enquete sur le Travail des Enfants et Opportunités d’Insertion a Nouakchott-Version Provisoire*, Ministry of Public Works and Employment and UNICEF, December 2006, 24, 27-28.

³²³³ Ibid.

³²³⁴ Ibid., 29-30, 33. See also SOS-Esclaves official, Interview with USDOL consultant, May 8, 2008, 13.

³²³⁵ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting*, November 30, 2007, para 12. See also U.S. Department of State, “Mauritania,” in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2009*, Washington, DC, March 11, 2010, sections 6 and 7d; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/index.htm>. See also Conventions on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention*, June 17, 2009, 16-17; available from <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/430/16/PDF/G0943016.pdf?OpenElement>.

³²³⁶ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, November 30, 2007*, para 12. See also U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Mauritania,” sections 6 and 7d. See also Conventions on the Rights of the Child, *Consideration of Reports Submitted by States Parties Under Article 44 of the Convention*, 16-17.

³²³⁷ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, February 11, 2010*, para 3. See also Ba Samba Hamady, *Rapport Narratif de l’enquête Participative sur la Situation des « almuube » à Nouakchott*, Association Enfants et Développement en Mauritanie, Save The Children, Comunidad de Madrid, November 2006, 12.

³²³⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Mauritania,” section 7d. See also Fall, *Enquete sur le Travail des Enfants et Opportunités d’Insertion a Nouakchott*, 19-20. See also de l’enfance et de la Famille Ministère des Affaires Sociales and UNICEF, *Etude sur le Trafic, la Traite et les Pires Formes de Travail des Enfants en Mauritanie: Rapport Final*, January 10, 2010, 57.

³²³⁹ Ministère de la Justice official, Interview with USDOL consultant, May 7, 2008, 27.

³²⁴⁰ U.S. Department of State, “Mauritania (Tier 3),” in *Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009*, Washington, DC, June 16, 2009; available from <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009>.

³²⁴¹ Ibid.

³²⁴² Ibid.

³²⁴³ Ibid. See also Association Enfants Développement en Mauritanie official, Interview with USDOL consultant, May 12, 2008, 53.

³²⁴⁴ U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009: Mauritania.” See also U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports- 2009: Mauritania.”

³²⁴⁵ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott official, E-mail communication to USDOL official, June 29, 2009.

³²⁴⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009: Mauritania.” See also Hamady, *Rapport Narratif de l’enquête Participative sur la Situation des « almuube »*, 12. See also Association Enfants Développement en Mauritanie official, Interview, May 12, 2008, 53.

³²⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons Report- 2009: Mauritania.”

³²⁴⁸ Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail*, Loi No. 2004-017, (July 2004), article 153; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=MRT&p_classification=01.02&p_origin=COUNTRY&p_sortby=SORTBY_COUNTRY. See also Government of Mauritania, *Loi n° 2001-054 du portant obligation de l’enseignement*, (July 19, 2001), article 1.

³²⁴⁹ Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail*, articles 153 and 154.

³²⁵⁰ Ibid., articles 155 and 164.

³²⁵¹ Ibid., article 247. See also ILO NATLEX National Labor Law Database, *Arreté no. 239 du 17 septembere 1954*, accessed October 11, 2006; available from http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=MRT&p_classification=04&p_origin=COUNTRY&p_sortby=SORTBY_COUNTRY.

³²⁵² Government of Mauritania, *Ordonnance 2005-015 portant protection penale de l’enfant*, (December 5, 2005), articles 24-27.

³²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 42.

³²⁵⁴ Government of Mauritania, *Code du travail*, article 5. See also ILO Committee of Experts, *Direct Request, Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182) Mauritania (ratification: 2001)*, [online] 2005 [cited December 16, 2010]; available from <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newcountryframeE.htm>. See also Government of Mauritania, *Loi n° 2007- 048 portant incrimination de l'esclavage et réprimant les pratiques esclavagistes*, (December 17, 2007), articles 1-3; available from <http://appablog.wordpress.com/2008/01/24/mauritanie-texte-de-la-loi-anti-esclavagiste-adoptee-par-les-deputes-mauritaniens/>. See also Government of Mauritania, *Loi n° 025/3003 portant repression de la traite des personnes*, (2003), articles 1-3.

³²⁵⁵ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Mauritania," in *Child Soldiers Global Report 2008*, London, 2008; available from <http://www.child-soldiers.org/home>.

³²⁵⁶ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, February 11, 2010*, para 2c7.

³²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, para 2d20. See also Ministère des Affaires Sociales de l'Enfance et de la Famille and UNICEF, *Strategie Nationale de Protection des Enfants en Mauritanie et Plan d'Action 2009-2013*, August 13, 2009, 25-27.

³²⁵⁸ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting*, February 10, 2010, para 17.

³²⁵⁹ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, February 11, 2010*, para 2c11.

³²⁶⁰ Conventions on the Rights of the Child, *Written Replies by the Government of Mauritania*, April 22, 2009, 4-5; available from <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G09/417/29/PDF/G0941729.pdf?OpenElement>.

³²⁶¹ Ministère des Affaires Sociales de l'Enfance et de la Famille and UNICEF, *Strategie Nationale de Protection des Enfants en Mauritanie et Plan d'Action*, 51-55.

³²⁶² IMF, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper: Mauritania*, Washington, DC, May 2009; available from <http://www.imf.org/external/np/prsp/prsp.asp#R>. See also Government of Mauritania, *Programme National de Developpement de Secteur Educatif 2001-2010*, 2001; available from http://www.educationfasttrack.org/media/library/Mauritania_Education_Plan.pdf.

³²⁶³ U.S. Embassy- Nouakchott, *reporting, February 11, 2010*, 2d20.

³²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, para 36.

³²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*