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USDOL – US Department of Labor

2020 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Mauritania

Minimal Advancement – Efforts Made but Continued Policy and Practice that Delayed Advancement

In 2020, Mauritania made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed a new NGO law (No. 2021-004) that eased requirements for registering non-governmental organizations, potentially helping advance human rights and anti-slavery organizations to be officially recognized. The government also adopted a new Human Trafficking Law (No. 2020/17), and amended the Law on Migrant Smuggling (No. 2010-021) that will support efforts to combat trafficking and addressing smuggling of migrants. However, despite new initiatives to address child labor, Mauritania is assessed as having made only minimal advancement because it continued to implement a policy and a practice that delays advancement to eliminate child labor. Although there were indications of progress, criminal law enforcement authorities did not make adequate efforts to combat slavery and its vestiges during the reporting period. The government prosecuted four defendants and convicted three traffickers in slavery-related cases in the Nouadhibou Anti-Slavery Court, but the government did not initiate any new investigations in 2020. In addition, since 2011, the government has required proof of marriage and biological parents' citizenship 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. 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. The government did not make sufficient efforts to enforce some laws related to the worst forms of child labor, including laws on hereditary slavery. In addition, a lack of financial resources and mitigation measures intended to limit the spread of COVID-19 severely limited the government's ability to fully implement policies, and social programs to combat the worst forms of child labor are insufficient to adequately address the extent of the problem. Moreover, the government did not publish comprehensive information about its labor law enforcement efforts.

I. Prevalence and Sectoral Distribution of Child Labor

Children in Mauritania are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in indentured and hereditary slavery. (1-4) Children also engage in dangerous tasks in agriculture, particularly in herding cattle and goats. (1,5-7) 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.

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	19.7 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	68.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	15.8
Primary Completion Rate (%)		72.9

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2019, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (8)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2015 (MICS), 2015. (9)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Herding and caring for cattle, camels, goats, and sheep (1,5,7,10-13)
	Harvesting fish and shrimp, including accompanying fishermen on boats and selling fish (1,5,7,11,12,14,15)
Industry	Crushing gravel (11,16)

	Construction (7)
Services	Domestic work (1,5-7,17)
	Working as car mechanics, painters, and carpenters (1,5-7,13,14)
	Garbage scavenging (1,6,13)
	Street work, including vending, shoe shining, begging, [†] and in the transportation sector (1,5-7,11,13)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of criminal gang recruitment and coercion by Koranic teachers (1,5,7,12,17-19)
	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (4,6)
	Use in illicit activities, including selling drugs (4,6,13,20)
	Indentured and hereditary slavery (1-3,7,10,18,20-23)
	Forced labor in domestic work, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,7,13,20)

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

[†] 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, especially from the Haratine ethnic minority, continue to be exploited as slaves and endure slave-like practices, particularly in rural and remote areas of the country. Some children are born into 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. (3-6,22,24) Child slaves herd animals, such as cattle and goats, and perform domestic labor. (3,4,7,15,16,25)

In Mauritania, it is a traditional practice to send children to Koranic teachers (*marabouts*) to receive an education. However, some Koranic teachers force their students (*talibés*) to beg on the streets for long hours and to surrender the money they have earned. (4,7,12,17,20)

Mauritania requires proof of marriage and a copy of the national identity cards of the parents or caregivers to obtain a birth certificate. This may have prevented children born out of wedlock and many Haratine and Sub-Saharan ethnic minority children, including from families of slave descent, from being registered at birth. (13,26,27) Although all families are required to register children for birth certificates, research found that the civil registration process, including obtaining birth certificates, is confusing and time consuming. Moreover, applicants have faced additional hardship due to the closure of registration centers outside the capital and a lack of training for registration center staff. (26-29) In early 2021, Mauritania canceled the requirement for students to possess a national identity card in order to take part in the national examinations to obtain the Certificate of Primary Education Studies (CEP). However, national identity cards are still required in order to take exams for middle and high school certificates. (15) Because both birth certificates and the CEP are required to enroll in secondary school in Mauritania, many children as young as age 12 cannot access secondary education, making them more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor. (6,7,10,13,18,24,27,30)

To address some of these challenges, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF) and the National Child Protection Council have established representation in all regions in Mauritania, and works to identify cases of citizens, including children, who are unable to register and provide them with the support needed to complete the registration process. (31) The government also appointed a special committee, headed by a presidential adviser, to review cases of unregistered applicants and facilitate documentation processes for marginalized and vulnerable communities. As part of the committee's efforts to facilitate documentation processes, its members have conducted site visits to civil registration centers during which they have provided support to individuals who have encountered difficulty in the civil registration process. (31,32) During the reporting period, the government continued to collaborate with UNHCR to issue birth certificates to Malian refugee children. (7,12,17,33,34)

In Mauritania, the lack of school infrastructure and limited availability of teachers, especially in rural areas, also impede access to education, which may increase children's vulnerability to the worst forms of child labor. (5,13,35) In addition, children from families of slave descent, especially from the Haratine ethnic minority, face barriers to accessing education due to ethnic discrimination. (10,22,36) Furthermore, refugee children may have difficulty accessing education or finding available classrooms, which makes them particularly vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor, including being recruited by non-state armed groups. (4,7,12,37-39)

II. Legal Framework for Child Labor

Mauritania has ratified most key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

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	✓

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Mauritania's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the identification of hazardous occupations or activities prohibited for children.

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	Yes	16	Article 76 of the General Child Protection Code (29)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 76 of the General Child Protection Code; Article 247 of the Labor Code (29,40)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	No		Articles 76 and 77 of the General Child Protection Code (29)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Articles 1 and 3–4 of Law 025/2003; Article 1 of Law 2013-011; Law 052/2015 (41-43)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 1 and 3 of Law 025/2003; Article 54 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (41,44)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 72 and 76 of the General Child Protection Code; Article 1 of Law 025/2003; Articles 24–26 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (29,41,44)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Articles 3–5 and 14 of Law 93-37 on the Prohibition of Production, Trafficking, and Use of Drugs and Illicit Substances (45)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 7 of Law 62132/1962 (46)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Article 43 of the Penal Protection Code for Children (44)
Compulsory Education Age	No	14	Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (47)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 1 of Law 2001-054 (47)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

* No conscription

In 2020, the Mauritanian parliament adopted a new Human Trafficking Law (No. 2020/17) to align national legislation with the Palermo Protocol; the law will create a new national authority to address human trafficking, and the government set up a Human Rights Inter-Ministerial Committee. (15,19) The Parliament also amended the Migrants Trafficking Law (No. 2010-021). (7,48,97) The new law aims to strengthen protections for victims and prosecution of perpetrators, including by exempting victims from legal prosecution for acts they were coerced into or forced to commit, and increasing penalties for government officials who are found guilty of engaging in human

trafficking. (15,19,48) In addition, under Article 7 of the Human Trafficking Law (No. 2020/17), convicted individuals may be sentenced to 10 years of prison and a fine of \$6,757 to \$13,514 (250,000 to 500,000 MRU), with an added 10 years if it is a slavery-related offense. (15,19)

According to Article 23 of the 2015 Anti-Slavery Law (Law 2015-0520), the only entities other than the Commissariat on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society Relations that can file criminal cases on behalf of former slaves are legally registered human rights associations that have been operating for 5 years in Mauritania. (32,43,49-52) However, during the reporting period, the government passed a new NGO Law (No. 2021-004) to ease NGO registration requirements and move oversight of NGOs operating in Mauritania from the Ministry of the Interior to the Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society Relations. (53,54) This law will also allow several previously excluded NGOs, including those working on issues such as slavery and racial justice, to begin officially operating. (7,55)

Although the 2018 General Child Protection Code prohibits the employment of children in work that exposes them to physical, psychological, or sexual abuse; work with dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools; and work in unhealthy environments that may expose children to hazardous substances or temperatures, it does not specify the types of work that are hazardous, including domestic work, a sector in which there is evidence of children carrying heavy loads and working long hours. (5,29,56) However, in 2020, the Ministry of Labor conducted a workshop with the participation of civil society organizations to revise the list of hazardous work prohibited for children. Even though it was expected that the list be finalized in 2020, discussions were postponed to March 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (7,15)

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. (40) However, the Labor Code does not specify the activities in which light work may be permitted. (57) In addition, children in Mauritania are required to attend school only up to age 14. This standard makes children ages 14 through 16 vulnerable to child labor because they are not required to attend school but are not legally allowed to work. (29,47)

III. Enforcement of Laws on Child Labor

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor's Directorate of Labor and Inspection	Enforces labor laws and investigates labor code infractions, including violations related to the minimum wage and hazardous work. (58,59)
Ministry of the Interior's Special Brigade for Minors	Investigates crimes against children, including human trafficking, and monitors religious schools (<i>mahadras</i>) to ensure that children are not forced to beg on behalf of their teachers. Mainly operates in the capital, Nouakchott. (6,36,60) During the reporting period, continued to employ 30 officers. (7,12)
Ministry of Justice's Directorate of the Judiciary for the Protection of Children	Assists with the enforcement of child protection issues and oversees tribunals responsible for sentencing offenders of laws related to children. (16)
Anti-Slavery Courts	Prosecute crimes related to slavery and provide free legal assistance to victims, including children. Located in Nema, Nouakchott, and Nouadhibou. (4,61-63)
National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH)	Serves as an independent ombudsman body that advocates for the eradication of slavery, receives human rights complaints, and conducts investigations on human rights violations, including the worst forms of child labor. (6,20,36)

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including financial resource allocation.

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$33,300 (12)	\$33,300 (7,64)
Number of Labor Inspectors	Unknown (12)	72 (64)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	No (12)	Yes (40)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (12)	Yes (64)

Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (12,32)	N/A (7)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (12)	No (7)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	Unknown (12)	Unknown (7)
Number Conducted at Worksite	Unknown (12)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	Unknown (12)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	Unknown (12)	Unknown (7)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (12)	Unknown (7)
Routine Inspections Conducted	No (12)	No (7)
Routine Inspections Targeted	N/A (12)	N/A (7)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (12,40)	Yes (40)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	No (32)	Yes (7,64)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (12)	Yes (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (12)	Yes (7)

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Due to pandemic mitigation measures imposed in 2020, refresher courses on labor law enforcement, including child labor laws, were not provided. (7,15) In addition, research found that the Ministry of Labor lacked equipment, training, transportation, and funding to conduct child labor inspections, especially in remote locations and in the informal sector, which employs more than 40 percent of the workforce. (5,7,12,50,58,60,65) During the reporting period, 67 new labor inspectors were enrolled at the National School of Administration, Journalism and the Judiciary, and upon graduation will join the existing ranks of inspectors. Training for new inspectors consists of education on the national labor code, including child labor laws, and on all labor-related conventions the country has ratified. (64) The government did not provide information on its labor law enforcement efforts, including the number and types of inspections, the number of violations found, and the number of penalties imposed and collected for inclusion in this report. (7)

Labor inspectors prepare reports when they find a labor violation and may include a recommendation for a penalty; they then are required to file the reports with the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice, in turn, assesses the penalty for the violation. (7,15) However, the penalties established for violating child labor laws are insufficient and do not generally deter violations. (7,51)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in Mauritania took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including the investigation and prosecution of criminal cases related to hereditary slavery.

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (12)	No (7)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (12)	N/A (7)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (12)	No (7)
Number of Investigations	3 (12)	N/A (7)
Number of Violations Found	3 (12)	N/A (7)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	8 (12,20,66)	0 (7)
Number of Convictions	5 (12)	0 (7)

Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (12)	N/A (7)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (12)	Yes (7)

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Efforts made by criminal law enforcement authorities to combat the worst forms of child labor, including hereditary slavery, remained inadequate given the magnitude of the problem. (4) Research indicates that some police, prosecutors, and judges do not investigate cases of slavery in response to complaints, and that the government has prosecuted cases for lesser offenses to avoid bringing a slavery case to trial. In some cases, this may be due to corruption, lack of political will to prosecute suspected slaveholders, or due to misunderstanding of the 2015 Anti-Slavery Law. (4,12,67,68) There are also reports that investigative judges who receive anti-slavery cases unlawfully dismiss cases by civil society organizations representing victims of slavery, and that they may try to pressure victims to drop their cases or accept mediation in lieu of prosecution. (7,14,50,56,65) In addition, there are reports that some cases of slavery are resolved through social mediation rather than through the criminal justice system. (12,20) Due to the pandemic, all court activity, including anti-slavery and human trafficking cases, was suspended in March 2020. The courts briefly reopened between October and November of 2020, and as of January 2021, the courts have fully reopened. (19) During the reporting period, there were three convictions in slavery-related cases, though the government did not initiate any new slavery prosecutions. Research was unable to determine whether any of the cases that resulted in convictions involved children. (7,15) Enforcement authorities, including the Anti-Slavery Courts, lack personnel, funding, and training to adequately coordinate and enforce laws related to the worst forms of child labor. (3,10,12,13,21,61,63,69,70) Slavery victims also encounter obstacles when filing complaints, including pressure from judges to drop their complaints. The government's failure to adequately investigate these cases may be due to the insufficient allocation of resources for prosecutions or to a lack of training for judicial officials. (14,50,56,65) However, the government took steps to increase the resources available to judicial officials to handle slavery cases, including by doubling the 2021 budget for the Anti-Slavery Courts. (15)

Historically, the government interfered in the work of and arrested anti-slavery activists. However, research was unable to find information that this practice occurred in 2020 following the passage of the new NGO law. (7,66,71) The government did not provide information on the number of violations found or investigations carried out related to the worst forms of child labor for inclusion in this report. (7) Furthermore, research found there is little to no coordination among enforcement agencies. (14,72)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Justice, in collaboration with UNHCR and the ILO, produced a first draft of an assessment of the criminal justice system and the complaints mechanism under the anti-slavery law, Law 2015-031. (7,15)

IV. Coordination of Government Efforts on Child Labor

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor. (Table 8) However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including the enlisting all relevant agencies to address all forms of child labor.

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Child Protection Council	Aims to develop and implement policies and programs to eradicate all forms of violence against children, including child labor. Chaired by the Prime Minister's adviser on social affairs, includes government and civil society stakeholders that address children's rights. (28,56,73-76) The Ministry of Labor did not participate in the activities of the National Child Protection Council. (15,32) The council continued to meet on a bimonthly basis. (64)
General Delegation for National Solidarity and Fight Against Exclusion (Taazour)	Coordinates and implements government programs to provide education, economic opportunity, and health services to vulnerable populations, including communities of slave descent. (12,77-79) The program provided over 200,000 families with direct cash assistance during the reporting period. (15,64)
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. (4,58,80,81) Carries out awareness-raising campaigns to combat slavery and human trafficking and acts as a civil party to victims of slavery in filing cases. 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. (4,15,58,80,81) As part of the new government's restructuring, the mandate of the National Agency to Combat the Vestiges of Slavery, Integration, and Fight Against Poverty's (<i>Tadamoun</i>) to act as a civil party on behalf of victims of slavery was transferred to the Commissariat on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society Relations. (12,32,49) The Commissariat held several workshops on the new trafficking in persons (TIP) law. (64) In 2020, the commissariat oversaw the approval of the new National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (PANTP 2020–2022). (19,82)

Inter-Ministerial Technical Committee on Human Rights	Coordinates and monitors government efforts to promote human rights in Mauritania, including those related to the UN CRC. Led by the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Civil Society Relations and includes representatives from <i>Taazour</i> , the CNDH, and other ministries. (58,83) The committee continued to hold meetings during the reporting period. (64)
Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood, and the Family (MASEF) Office of Childhood	Develops and implements programs to protect vulnerable children and to monitor alleged violations of child labor laws, including those related to the worst forms of child labor. Manages the Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children. (6,58) In 2020, the Ministry of Justice, in coordination with MASEF, set up a rehabilitation center for victims of slavery to reinstate their full civil rights and liberties. (7) A new separate child protection and integration center was inaugurated in Nouadhibou in November 2020, mainly aimed at providing care to migrants. (15) The ministry continued to run several children shelters during the reporting period. (64)
Human Rights Inter-Ministerial Committee*	Led by the Prime Minister with bimonthly meetings planned. Tasked with implementing the National Action Plan to combat TIP (PANTP), carrying out the U.S. Department of State's TIP Report recommendations, and monitoring the human rights situation in the country. (15,19) The Prime Minister chaired the first meeting in December, and key ministries included the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, and the Commission on Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Relations with Civil Society. (7,19)

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

* Mechanism to coordinate efforts to address child labor was created during the reporting period.

V. Government Policies on Child Labor

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including funding and implementation of key policies.

Policy	Description
National Action Plan to Eliminate Child Labor (2015–2020)	Overseen by the Ministry of Labor, aimed to eliminate the worst forms of child labor by strengthening child labor laws, training relevant government officials, implementing awareness-raising campaigns, and mobilizing funds for social programs to withdraw children from child labor. (1,5,13,58) Will be replaced by a new plan, PANETE-RIM 2 (2016–2030), which was being developed in 2020 and will be aligned with Mauritania's commitment to the Alliance 8.7 efforts and to drafting a general code of child protection, defining Convention 182 provisions. (64)
National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons (PANTP) (2020–2022)†	Adopted in March 2020, aims to address forced child labor, forced child begging, forced prostitution, slavery, and other forms of child exploitation. Overseen by the Commissariat for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action, and Civil Society Relations with a budget of \$145,946 (5.4 million MRU) for implementation. (19,82) Due to the pandemic, suspended many planned activities during the reporting period. (19) Increased budgets for anti-slavery courts, and passed NGO law under this policy. (64)
Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development (2016–2030)	Aims to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development, and increase access to fundamental social services. Overseen by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development. (84,85) Integrates strategies to increase birth registration and access to compulsory education, strengthen social protection systems for children, and support efforts to combat slavery, including its vestiges. (84) Continued to be pursued during the reporting period. (64)
National Child Protection Strategy (2020–2025)†	Aims to protect children against violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect. Specifically includes children exploited at work and victims of human trafficking, children living on the streets, and children who are victims of violence or sexual exploitation. (7,86) Begun developing a database to identify children at risk of engaging in hazardous work during the reporting period, in collaboration with UNICEF and the ILO. (15)

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

Research found that efforts to implement most of the key policies related to child labor continue to be delayed due to insufficient allocation of resources. (14,56,87,88)

Mauritania continues to be a Pathfinder country under Alliance 8.7, an international partnership with 22 member countries, and facilitated by the ILO Secretariat. This involves a commitment toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7, which calls for the eradication of forced labor, modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labor by 2025. (89)

VI. Social Programs to Address Child Labor

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of efforts to address the problem in all sectors.

Program	Description
Program to Eradicate the Effects of Slavery†	Government program that supports the reintegration and rehabilitation of former slaves. (4,90) Organized several information caravans to raise awareness of the new TIP law and slavery-related practices during the reporting period. (64)
Cash Transfer <i>Tekavoul</i> (2015–2025)†	A \$45 million <i>Taazour</i> program, supported by the World Bank, the Adaptive Social Protection Program for the Sahel, and co-financed by the German and Mauritanian governments. Provides cash assistance to families with school-age children, conditioned on children’s school attendance. (64,78,79) About 35,000 households in extreme poverty benefit from the program. Was extended for an additional 5 years and allocated an additional \$72 million in 2020 to reinforce efforts in the social protection system. (64) Contributes to the G5 Sahel’s Emergency Development Program (PDU), as part of new phase. (64)
Centers for the Protection and Social Integration of Children†	MASEF-operated program that provides short-term food, shelter, education, and vocational training to vulnerable children, many of whom are <i>talibés</i> . Operates in Aleg, Kaédi, Kiffa, Nouadhibou, Rosso, and Nouakchott. (5,6) With financial support from an NGO, managed seven centers around the country in 2020, offering short-term protection and social integration services to vulnerable children, including potential TIP victims. During the reporting period, supported 120 children, compared with 350 from the previous year, and referred victims to NGOs for long-term care. (15,64)
Model <i>Mahadras</i> Program†	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>imams</i>) across Mauritania to raise awareness of children’s rights, including information on child labor and child trafficking. (20) Continued to operate in 2020 in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and the ILO in identifying hazardous forms of labor. (64)
UNICEF Country Program (2018–2022)	A \$13.8 million UNICEF-funded program that supports government efforts to improve education, birth registration rates, social inclusion, and protection for children, including refugees. (7,91) In 2020, provided food assistance to vulnerable families, with at least 24,305 cases of severe acute malnutrition admitted for treatment. (15,64) Supported the Ministry of Health in implementing a national Child Health Day campaign which integrated screening children for acute malnutrition during the reporting period. (64)
Decent Work for Migrant Youth in the Fishing Sector (2017–2021)	A \$17 million ILO- and Government of Germany-funded, 4-year project to promote decent work among youth working in the artisanal fishing sector in Mauritania. Plans to reach at least 9,000 recipients and to conduct an analysis of child labor in the fishing sector. (7) Hosted a workshop focusing on social dialogue and protection of artisanal fisheries during the reporting period. (64)
USDOL-Funded Projects	USDOL-funded global projects implemented by the ILO to support global and national efforts aimed at countering child labor and the forced labor of adults and children. Include From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labor (The Bridge Project) , and the Measurement, Awareness-Raising, and Policy Engagement (MAP 16) Project on Child Labor and Forced Labor (2019–2021) , a \$250,000 program. (12,92-94) In 2020, a steering committee was convened by the Ministry of Labor in collaboration with the ILO and UNICEF to organize a high-level virtual roundtable on the pandemic and child labor focusing on future perspectives in times of crisis. The roundtable discussion highlighted the vulnerability of children in the time of COVID-19 and their increased risk of becoming victims of forced labor. (7) At the end of the roundtable, the tripartite stakeholders recommended the formalization of the steering committee of the National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Child Labor (PANETE-RIM) and launched an evaluation of PANETE-RIM with all concerned stakeholders. (7,12,65,95) Additional information is available on the USDOL website .

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

† Program is funded by the Government of Mauritania.

Although Mauritania has social programs that target child labor, the scope of these programs is insufficient to fully address the extent of the problem, especially in agriculture, herding, and domestic work, and for children in hereditary and indentured slavery. (12,14,58,96) Moreover, some government officials do not acknowledge that slavery continues to exist. (2,3,20,24,58,67,69) In addition, the lack of recent data on slavery limits the government’s ability to develop effective social programs to comprehensively address this issue. Existing social programs for former slaves and awareness of the national laws on slavery are insufficient. (2,24)

VII. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Mauritania (Table 11).

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Accede to the UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict.	2019 – 2020
	Identify hazardous occupations and activities prohibited for children, including in sectors in which child labor is known to occur.	2009 – 2020
	Ensure that the law’s light work provisions specify the conditions in which such work may be undertaken.	2015 – 2020
	Raise the compulsory education age to align with the minimum age for work.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure that the new NGO law allows for newly registered civil society organizations to have the ability to immediately file criminal court cases on behalf of former slaves.	2020
Enforcement	Increase training and 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.	2010 – 2020
	Strengthen the labor inspection system by authorizing the labor inspectorate to initiate routine and targeted inspections, rather than performing inspections based solely on complaints received.	2014 – 2020
	Ensure that penalties are high enough to deter the violation of child labor laws.	2015 – 2020
	Ensure that routine inspections are conducted.	2020
	Ensure that there is close coordination and collaboration between all enforcement agencies in the Mauritanian Government.	2020
	Increase efforts to ensure that cases of the worst forms of child labor, including hereditary slavery and forced begging, are investigated and prosecuted in accordance with the law.	2016 – 2020
	Ensure that judicial sector officials have the proper training and awareness of slavery issues, and that they do not improperly dismiss or fail to refer appropriate cases to the Anti-Slavery Courts.	2020
	Ensure that information on criminal law enforcement efforts and data are collected and published each year.	2020
	Publish information on labor law enforcement efforts, including the number and types of inspections conducted, the number of child labor law violations found, and the number of penalties assessed and collected.	2019 – 2020
Coordination	Ensure that the Ministry of Labor participates in the National Child Protection Council.	2018 – 2020
Government Policies	Ensure that key policies related to child labor receive sufficient resources, including funds, for effective implementation.	2016 – 2020
Social Programs	Expand the scope of programs to address child labor, including in agriculture, herding, and domestic work, and the worst forms of child labor, including hereditary and indentured slavery.	2009 – 2020
	Implement a continuous awareness-raising program for government officials on the laws related to slavery and the worst forms of child labor.	2012 – 2020
	Conduct research and collect data on slavery to inform the development of effective policies and programs to identify and protect children who are at risk.	2010 – 2020
	Increase funding for social programs that provide services to former slaves.	2015 – 2020
	Ensure that all children are able to obtain birth certificates to increase their access to secondary education and reduce their vulnerability to the worst forms of child labor.	2016 – 2020

Increase funding dedicated to school infrastructure and teacher availability, especially in rural areas, to eliminate barriers and make education accessible for 2011 – 2020 all children, including those from families of slave descent and refugees.

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

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