



Preliminary findings and observations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants on his visit to Mauritania from 2 to 12 September 2025

1. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Gehad Madi, conducted an official visit to Mauritania from 2 to 12 September 2025 to assess the country's migration governance including laws, policies and practices, and their impact in the human rights of migrants measured against Mauritania's international human rights obligations.
2. The Special Rapporteur commends the constructive way in which the Government facilitated his visit. The openness of the Government enabled a frank and open dialogue on multiple issues. He particularly thanks the Commission for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society for their well-organized engagement with his mandate and the solid support in preparation for and then throughout his full visit. He particularly commends the cooperative approach of all authorities at State and regional level and the readiness to accommodate emerging requests. He also thanks the Office of the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Mauritania for the exceptional efforts to make his visit possible despite the ongoing financial crisis at the United Nations. He also thanks the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration for their support provided during the visit.
3. The Special Rapporteur held meetings with central and regional authorities, the National Human Rights Commission of Mauritania (CNDH), representatives of civil society organizations, migrant community representatives, United Nations entities and humanitarian actors present in Mauritanie. He also met with migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and representatives of the diplomatic community. Mr. Madi also visited temporary migrant centres as well as retention and detention centres in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, he could not complete his visit to Sélibaby as initially planned. However, an online meeting was held with some community leaders representing migrant groups in Sélibaby. The Special Rapporteur had the honour to meet with His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani, President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and His Excellency Mr. Moktar Ould Djaï, Prime Minister.
4. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur was able to see from first line the Mauritanian Government and humanitarian actors in action as they attended to three cases of disembarkation of migrants, on 01, 03 and 07 September. These operations involved a total of 339 migrants over the course of one week, including 36 women and 30 children. The Special Rapporteur would like to commend the Government for its readiness and swift reaction in these emergencies. While recognizing the challenges, Mr. Madi welcomes the measures put in place, including Standard Operating Procedures between the Government and United Nations specialized agencies and humanitarian actors. He also notes the essential assistance of civil society mobility and presence during the disembarkation of migrants. It is important to note the need for international financial assistance to the Government of Mauritania to carry on activities in accordance with its international protection obligations.

5. Mauritania's geographical location makes it a key transit and destination country for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and countries affected by conflict and instability. In recent years, the government has adopted laws, created institutions, and developed mechanisms to better govern migration, combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and provide humanitarian assistance. Yet, the gap between legal frameworks and lived realities remains profound. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers still face arbitrary arrest, detention, refoulement, abuse, discrimination, and systemic corruption. Despite the efforts of the government at central and regional level, findings from field visits in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, as well as information and testimonies compiled from migrants reveal persistent human rights violations, shortcomings in implementation, and systemic legal and institutional deficits.
6. The Government of Mauritania has introduced several key measures. In 2020, the National Assembly adopted Law 2020-017 on trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants. This law criminalizes trafficking networks, provides protection to victims, and created a specialized tribunal to prosecute such cases. The law also enabled the creation of a National Body for Combating Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling was created. A Central Office for the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling has also been established. The National Mechanism for the Prevention of Torture (MNP), established in 2016, has the mandate to conduct visits to detention sites, including those holding migrants, to prevent torture and inhuman treatment. Four centers for migrants have been established — three in Nouakchott (Arafat, Dar Naim, and Sebkha) and one Nouadhibou (Maison Blanche). The Government also launched a national referral mechanism for trafficking victims for the period 2024-2026.
7. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the news that a draft law on asylum is in works at the Ministry of Justice Interior and he reiterates his readiness to provide technical assistance, in coordination with relevant United Nations specialized agencies, to ensure the legislation includes all international protection and human rights guarantees.
8. Recognizing its role in regional migration management, Mauritania has shown its willingness to cooperate with UN bodies and international organizations. Regarding refugee protection, joint committee between the Ministry of Interior and UNHCR was established to review refugee status claims. The Government reports that refugees circulate freely and have the right to work in the formal economy. The Labor Code includes non-discrimination provisions and protects migrant workers' right to association. The Ministry of Labor has deployed 15 inspection offices nationwide to enforce compliance.
9. On search and rescue operations at sea, the Mauritanian Coast Guard is responsible for maritime rescue, covering a stretch of more than 700 kilometers of coastline. In 2023, more than 2,700 migrants were rescued at sea; in 2024, more than 8,000; and in 2025, nearly 2,000 by mid-year. International partners — notably the Guardia Civil of Spain, FRONTEX, UNHCR, IOM, MSF, and the Red Cross — provide logistical, technical, and financial support.
10. However, the reality documented in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou by Government institutions, civil society, and the UN reveals persistent and grave problems. migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers continue to face systemic violations. According to the information received, in both Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, migrants are frequently arrested without explanation — in their homes, in the streets, in workplaces, or during voluntary return journeys. Phones are confiscated, documents seized or destroyed, and communication with families is denied. Detention conditions remain poor. In centers such as Arafat or Nouadhibou – Maison Blanche, migrants live in overcrowded rooms, with

inadequate food, minimal medical care, and severe language barriers. The Government itself has acknowledged shortcomings including food scarcity and lack of healthcare.

11. Perhaps the most alarming practice is the collective expulsion of migrants. Malians, Sudanese, and others fleeing active conflicts are deported without assessment of their protection needs. Children — including unaccompanied minors — and women have also been expelled. Deportations occur within 72 hours of arrest, leaving no possibility of appeal or legal aid. These expulsions violate not only Mauritania's commitments under international law but also its own stated policies of non-refoulement. Deportations should be judicial decisions allowing migrants to appeal them. Currently, the decision to deport is merely administrative and does not provide the basic guarantees to any individual.
12. Women migrants face particular risks. Reports indicate night raids by police, verbal and physical abuse, sexual assault, and extortion. Many women are handcuffed during deportations, a degrading practice. In some cases, they are expelled separately from their children or spouses, which violates the principle of family unity. The Special Rapporteur also notes that a number of individuals, including minors, require special protection and additional medical, psychological and financial assistance, including for people living with disabilities and victims of abuse, including sexual abuse.
13. During his visit, the Special Rapporteur also received information on a pattern of systemic corruption among police. Officers demand bribes for release, confiscate documents, and fabricate charges to justify arrest or deportation. Even migrants with valid residence permits as well as refugees and asylum seekers are targeted. Discrimination is entrenched in practice. Sub-Saharan Africans — nationals of Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Niger — are disproportionately targeted for arrest and expulsion. While Senegalese nationals benefit from a bilateral agreement simplifying residence permit procedures, they are also victims of arbitrary detention, discrimination and deportation. The prohibitive costs, administrative hurdles and lack of information and clarity about the process and requirements for the obtention of residence cards, render the situation of migrants in Mauritania increasingly difficult. It makes them vulnerable to abuses from the authorities, makes them target smugglers and trafficking networks, as regularizing their status becomes nearly impossible.
14. Racial discrimination experienced by migrants has a negative impact on individuals and social cohesion. Mauritania should acknowledge their existence and step up efforts to eliminate, condemn and counter all forms of discrimination and xenophobia, and reshape harmful and dehumanizing narratives against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. This includes not only recognizing their contributions to Mauritanian society, including its economy, but also affirming their rights and dignity as rightsholders.
15. Among the information collected during interviews and other meetings, the Special Rapporteur requests the Director-General of National Security (DGSN) to conduct awareness raising campaigns amongst their personnel for the recognition of official protection documents and warns the authorities of what appears to be a common practice to request individual payments, including through online transfers via mobile banking application (Bankily, Masrvi or other similar platforms), in exchange for let them go by police personnel when detained in the street or in their homes or in other places they may have been.
16. During the first week of his visit, Mr. Madi was made aware that since his arrival in the country, the round-ups and detention of migrants by the police and gendarmerie in places frequented by the migrant community have reduced. He notes with concern the report that upon his departure from Nouadhibou, such practice has resumed. He reminds the

Government that targeted round-ups against the migrant community are in violation of Mauritania's international obligations. He will continue to monitor the situation and calls the authorities to immediately halt such harassment against migrants and people in need of international protection such as asylum seekers and refugees.

17. In addition to reports of arbitrary detention and deportation, the Special Rapporteur also received information that asylum seekers and refugees suffer the same fate as other migrants. When stopped by the police, their UNHCR-issued documents such as refugee cards, asylum-seeker certificate and appointment slip for registration as asylum seekers, are taken away by officers and sometimes destroyed, leaving them without identification means. This has led to their refoulement. In some instances, these individuals would manage to return to Mauritania and obtain from UNHCR their documents again. The Special Rapporteur notes with concern that the same individuals will be victims of this practice not once, but repeatedly. Collective expulsions, without individual assessment, violate the 1951 Refugee Convention and the Convention against Torture.
18. Regarding the identification, registration and notification to relevant diplomatic representations of migrants arriving to Mauritania, the Government faces serious challenges. Given the number of migrants and the limited human and financial resources at their disposal, Mauritania is unable to identify and register all individuals within the 72-hour hold/delay the new law stipulates before their deportation. Despite them contacting IOM to assist with the process, the delays and unawareness of the police personnel and the staff in migrant retention centres of the role of specialized UN agencies may delay their access to the victims. Despite the existing memorandums of understanding between the UN specialized agencies and the Government of Mauritania, constraints such as delayed or no access to migrants in retention centres exacerbates their vulnerabilities. In addition, the Special Rapporteur received reports that authorities fail to inform the diplomatic representations and denying them access to their nationals when they are in administrative detention, therefore de facto depriving migrants of consular assistance.
19. In addition, the Special Rapporteur was informed that deportations are carried out through buses that leave the migrants, at their own fate, stranded at the border with neighbouring countries, Mali and Senegal. For undocumented migrants and nationals of other countries not neighbouring Mauritania such as Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, DRC, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Benin, Burkina Faso, Nigeria- finding themselves at a border control – Rosso or Gogui – represents for them another challenge as they will not be allowed to get into Mali or Senegal to transit to their countries of origin.
20. The Special Rapporteur welcomes the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to ensure that bilateral agreements / memorandums of understanding are put in place between Mauritania and Senegal to manage and improve the situation of their nationals migrating to Mauritania, including the negotiation of requirements for the obtention of residency cards. The Special Rapporteur was informed that such an agreement was proposed to Mali but the Government of Mauritania still awaits Mali's response.
21. Regarding the situation of minors in Mauritania, the Special Rapporteur notes that Governmental mechanisms are in place, in cooperation with UN specialized agencies such as UNHCR, OIM and civil society organizations, to place migrant unaccompanied minors under the protection of CPISE (Center for the Protection and Social Integration of Children) and foster families chosen after a careful screening process. This positive practice allows the minor to spend the time before their voluntary return facilitated by the OIM with other children and in a caring environment. Children may continue their studies and engage in other activities.

22. The Special Rapporteur observes that, despite the existence of reception and child protection structures, unaccompanied migrant children are not systematically referred to specialized services upon disembarkation to ensure adequate protection. In some cases, children are even deported directly to the border without proper assessment or safeguards, raising serious concerns about compliance with international child protection standards.
23. It was brought to the Special Rapporteur's attention that medical cases are not consistently referred due to the non-mobilization of key actors, such as the Regional Directorate of Sanitary Action (DRAS) and the absence of a proper medical screening at the disembarkation site.
24. The Special Rapporteur notes that the Government of Mauritania has indicated that some children in conflict with the law are placed in detention and rehabilitation centres such as CARSEC. The Director of CARSEC indicated that during their detention in semi-open or closed facilities, children are offered the option to take part in ateliers for different activities and to resume or start their studies. These centres, under the supervision of the Director of Penitentiary Centres, also allows family visits and provides children with necessary care, including medical assistance. However, the Special Rapporteur was extremely disappointed to verify the dire conditions of detention of these children. He is also concerned that despite medical permanence in the centre, medical check-up and urgent assistance is not provided.
25. The Special Rapporteur addresses the following recommendations to the Government of Mauritania:
 - a) Adopt a comprehensive asylum law that guarantees fair, transparent, and accessible refugee protection.
 - b) End collective expulsions and ensure every individual case is assessed before removal. Revise Article 3 of Law No. 2024-029 to incorporate procedural safeguards in line with Mauritania's human rights obligations and the principle of non-refoulement.
 - c) Ensure the protection of family unity and the best interests of the child by implementing protocols that prevent family separation during deportation and disembarkation, including prior family assessments, prioritization of non-custodial measures for families with children, and coordination with child protection services for reunification and care of unaccompanied or separated minors.
 - d) Promote more bilateral agreements to strengthen joint management of migration flows, including entry and residency. Support the implementation of readmission agreements like those recently signed in the subregion.
 - e) Establish cross-sectoral coordination—particularly with MASEF, INLCTPTM, and the Ministry of Interior—to guarantee timely referral and protection for unaccompanied minors, families, and individuals with special needs.
 - f) Strengthen judicial oversight of detention and guarantee humane conditions in all centres.
 - g) Establish independent bodies to investigate and sanction corruption and abuse against migrants, asylum seekers and refugees by police officers.
 - h) Improve security forces' training in human rights, ensuring the protection of the human rights of migrants during checks and interventions.
 - i) Provide gender-sensitive protections, including shelters for women and children.

- j) Organize community awareness campaigns on the rights and responsibilities of migrants residing in Mauritania. Develop targeted programs for children and women, ensuring compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and CEDAW. Both should be done in collaboration with national institutions, civil society and United Nations specialized agencies to ensure a human rights based approach.
- k) Clarify, simplify and reduce the cost of residence permits, ensuring transparency and non-discrimination. Engaging local embassies and migrant community leaders to disseminate accurate information, support applicants, and strengthen trust between institutions and migrant populations
- l) Allocate domestic resources to search-and-rescue operations and migrant reception facilities.
- m) Ensure that any return measure concerning a migrant is based on an individual procedure, respectful of fundamental rights and in compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and international standards.
- n) Facilitate access to legal status for migrants in Mauritania by reducing administrative, financial, and legal barriers to obtaining and renewing residence permits.
- o) Ensure that administrative detention centres comply with international human rights standards, by providing dignified, humane, and secure conditions of detention for migrants deprived of liberty.
- p) Train security forces on the rights of migrants and the fight against trafficking, in order to prevent human rights violations in the context of migration management and to strengthen the capacity of security personnel to protect migrants, especially those exposed to trafficking and smuggling.
- q) Raise awareness of existing complaint mechanisms and ensure that migrants have secure, confidential, and impartial access to a complaint mechanism in case of rights violations, outside of administrative or security structures involved in their control.

26. Regarding the international community:

- a) Cooperation agreement – including with the European Union – should include fundamental guarantees, respect for human rights, transparency, and accountability. Rather than focusing narrowly on securitization, such agreements should prioritize protection and support Mauritania in building the institutional capacity it needs. These agreement should also ensure the implementation of effective legal safeguards for the final beneficiaries through establishing independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- b) To promote a human rights-based approach to migration by systematically integrating the principles of dignity, non-discrimination, participation, and accountability into the design, implementation, and evaluation of migration policies, in order to ensure effective and equitable protection of migrants
- c) Provide financial and technical support to strengthen Mauritania's institutions, focusing on protection rather than securitization.
- d) Invest in civil society organizations, which are already delivering assistance and monitoring abuses on the ground.

27. To the United Nations and other International Organizations:

- a) Reinforce UNHCR's presence in Nouadhibou and border regions to guarantee access to asylum procedures.
- b) Expand joint monitoring between OHCHR, IOM, UNICEF, and Mauritanian institutions.
- c) Promote regional cooperation frameworks to harmonize migration governance across West Africa while upholding international protection standards.

28. To all actors involved in migrant protection:

- a) Adopt a human rights-based approach, integrating the principles of dignity, non-discrimination, participation, and accountability.
- b) Promote intersectoral coordination, through the sharing of information, resources, and best practices.
- c) Establish accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency and effectiveness of interventions.
- d) Mobilize the necessary resources to guarantee the sustainability of protection efforts.

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