

Modern Slavery

Mauritania is one of the final frontiers of slavery even years after abolition.

In Northwestern Africa there lies a country not many talk about called Mauritania, an Islamic nation with a small population of 5 million people. [40% of the population](#) is made up of Black people (Haratin) and [30% is made up of Arabs](#) (Bidahn). The country is rather poor with sources like Macro Trends and Global Finance Magazine claiming over 50% of the population is impoverished and 15% are in extreme poverty.



Enslaved Mauritanian women

For many years in Mauritanian society, the Bidahn people have taken dominance over the Haratin people and part of that has been by enslaving them. [In 1905](#), the French called for slavery to end in Mauritania but didn't choose to enforce it as they felt it was a part of the country's culture leaving the Haratins to continue fighting for freedom on their own. When emancipation started happening it didn't free slaves as they didn't have socioeconomic freedom and practically kept them in their owners' grasp. The country [abolished slavery in 1981](#) and criminalized it in 2007 and 2015 but this has done little to nothing to actually end the issue.

Very few cases of slavery have ended up in the courts and even fewer people have been successfully prosecuted for slavery in the country's history. It is estimated that [90,000](#) of the population are still enslaved and another source claiming [1 in 2 Haratins](#) are a victim of some form of forced labor. A large reason people continue to be enslaved is because when an enslaved woman has a child, that child automatically belongs to the slave owner regardless of biological relations causing an endless cycle of slavery. The government denies the existence of slavery in the country and people who speak out about it are at risk of being arrested and tortured. The government denying slavery has caused a large absence in statistics like how many people are enslaved in 2025, what percentage are women and children, and how many slaves have been freed recently.



Slaves inside of a tent near their master's house

Mauritania uses [an unorthodox teaching of Islam](#) which teaches that a Muslim may enslave another Muslim and that the way to paradise for a slave is through their owner. Islam does not teach this and the Quran even has verses that encourage the freeing of slaves. Since the country follows Sharia Law which strictly enforces the teaching of Islam, if a slave were to leave their master it could be seen as illegal due to them [believing it is a sin](#) to do so. This interpretation of Islam causes the law that criminalizes slavery to not be followed, as Sharia Law is put above it.

As organizations like [Antislavery.org](#), the Initiative for the Resurgence of the Abolitionist movement (IRA), and the Alliance for the Refoundation of the Mauritanian State (AREM) call for reform in the nation, they continue to be treated poorly by the government. [14 people were arrested](#) in February, 2021 after attending an AREM meeting and 5 of them were found guilty in court for “violating the sanctity of God” and were sentenced to 6 to 8 months of prison. People are working hard to end slavery in the nation and a future without slavery is becoming more plausible as more cases are ending up in the courts. Slave owners are starting to be held accountable for their actions but it is uncertain how widespread this will become. For now the Haratins continue to be enslaved and held against their will by their law breaking owners.