

# **MAURITANIA:** REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS ABUSES IN EUROPE'S 'BULWARK' AGAINST MIGRATION

*GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT SUBMISSION TO THE  
UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON MIGRANTS*

**SUBMITTED: AUGUST 2025**



## THE GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT MISSION

The Global Detention Project (GDP) is a non-profit organisation based in Geneva that promotes the human rights of people who have been detained for reasons related to their non-citizen status. Our mission is:

- To promote the human rights of detained migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers;
- To ensure transparency in the treatment of immigration detainees;
- To reinforce advocacy aimed at reforming detention systems;
- To nurture policy-relevant scholarship on the causes and consequences of migration control policies.

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## **MAURITANIA:**

### REFUGEE AND MIGRANT ABUSES IN EUROPE'S 'BULWARK' AGAINST MIGRATION

#### GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT SUBMISSION TO THE UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON MIGRANTS AHEAD OF HIS VISIT TO MAURITANIA

AUGUST 2025

The Global Detention Project (GDP) welcomes the opportunity to provide this report to the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants ahead of his visit to Mauritania. This submission provides an overview of the migration context in the country and proposes recommendations concerning the detention and deportation of migrants as well as with respect to the impact of European externalisation efforts on the evolution of Mauritanian enforcement practices. We also suggest specific sites to visit and experts to contact.

#### **SUMMARY**

Mauritania is an important transit country for African migrants and asylum seekers attempting to reach Spain's Canary Islands, particularly when other routes to Europe are blocked. With support from Spain and the EU, Mauritania has sought to curb transit migration by strengthening border enforcement, assisting interdiction efforts, and expanding detention operations. Authorities have faced repeated criticism for arbitrary arrests, detentions, and expulsions, with numerous reports citing serious violations of fundamental rights. A lack of transparency surrounding detention operations complicates efforts to comprehensively document the country's detention regime, but reports suggest that migrants and asylum seekers are being detained in prisons across the country.

## BACKGROUND AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Over the past two decades, Mauritania has emerged as a key waypoint on the north-west Africa migration route, which has resulted in its policies and practices being heavily impacted by European externalisation efforts.<sup>1</sup> In the early 2000s, under pressure from Spain, Morocco tightened border controls, effectively closing off traditional routes across the Strait of Gibraltar. But instead of halting migration, these practices prompted the migration route to shift south, with Mauritania emerging as an important destination and transit country for migrants and asylum seekers hoping to attempt the journey to Spain's Canary Islands. Between 2001 and 2002, the number of migrants reaching the Canary Islands more than doubled, from 4,105 to 9,875.<sup>2</sup>

As the numbers of migrants attempting the dangerous sea journey increased, Spain and the EU have moved to intensify their influence over Mauritania's migration management, developing political and legal instruments, building detention centres, and establishing agreements aimed at blocking migratory routes to the EU.<sup>3</sup> (See Figure 1, below.)

In 2006, Spain and Mauritania issued a Joint Communiqué of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs to strengthen joint migration controls, and cooperated in opening Mauritania's first detention centre—[inside a former school in Nouadhibou](#)—to hold migrants and asylum seekers intercepted on route to Europe or returned from Spain.<sup>4</sup> Spain's role in establishing the facility sparked questions about who ultimately controlled the facility and guaranteed detainees' rights: while the Mauritanian National Security Service appeared to manage the site, Mauritanian officials stated that this was at the express request of the Spanish government.

That same year, Spain—with EU support—also deployed military and technological resources along the Mauritanian coast to prevent disembarkations.<sup>5</sup> Four years later, in 2010, the country published a [national migration strategy](#). This was developed in cooperation with EU technical experts and was primarily designed to enhance border control and security.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, M. Flynn, "There and Back Again: On the Diffusion of Immigration Detention," *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 2014, <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/there-and-back-again-on-the-diffusion-of-immigration-detention>, which notes: "As migratory patterns have changed in response to hardening EU borders, so too have detention practices, often with unpredictable consequences. In some instances, countries that had previously not experienced significant migratory events have found themselves forced to cope with large numbers of migrants. They have also found themselves under pressure from Europe to interdict migrants and asylum seekers (adaption through externality) — a phenomenon that occurred in various West African countries when the route through Morocco was shut down in the early 2000s."

<sup>2</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "North-West Passage: The Resurgence of Maritime Irregular Migration to the Canary Islands," December 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Lucia-Bird-Canary-Island-December-2022.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> M. Flynn, "On Its Border, New Problems: EU Efforts to Externalise Immigration Controls," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November/December 2006, <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/europe-on-its-border-new-problems>

<sup>4</sup> This centre was closed in 2012. It had been the subject of numerous reports of abuse, overcrowding, and terrible hygiene conditions. According to reports that we have received and seen since, the centre remains closed.

<sup>5</sup> Migration-Control.info, "The Atlantic Route to Europe and the Border Regime in Mauritania," 5 April 2021, <https://migration-control.info/en/blog/atlantic-route-border-regime-mauritania/>

While arrivals in the Canary Islands dropped in the wake of these practices—in 2010, 196 arrivals were registered, and numbers stayed low during the following decade<sup>6</sup>—more recently the numbers attempting the journey from Mauritania have increased significantly, prompted by a variety of factors, including Moroccan migration policies, the conflict in Guerguerat (resulting in blocking the crossing between Mauritania and Western Sahara)), and instability in the Sahel. According to Alarmphone, 54 percent of the 658 vessels that arrived in the Canary Islands in 2024 originated from Mauritania.<sup>7</sup> Spain's National Security Department also reports that 25,081 migrants landed on Spanish soil from Mauritania in 2024, compared to 13,217 from Morocco and 12,038 from Algeria.<sup>8</sup> On top of this, Mauritania is also the leading country to receive deportation flights from Spain—based on a 2003 immigration agreement between the two countries.<sup>9</sup>

With these growing numbers, the country has come under renewed pressure in the past two years from the EU, as well as Spain, to block migrants. On 7 March 2024, the European Commission and the Mauritania Government signed a [migration partnership agreement](#) which included the promise of 210 million EUR to Mauritania for curbing irregular migration.<sup>10</sup> The agreement specifically references European involvement in the country's practices—featuring wording including “enhanced cooperation between Mauritania and Frontex,” and “with a view to implementing this cooperation framework, Mauritania and the EU reaffirm their intention to cooperate at an operational level.”

Spain, too, has doubled down in its efforts to externalise migration controls to Mauritania. During a visit in August 2024, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced a new Memorandum of Understanding for “regular and circular” migration, reflecting Spain's desire to deepen its partnership. Some Spanish security forces are also deployed in the country and observers confirm that they have been involved in migrant apprehensions.

Describing the arrest and detention of non-nationals, Alarmphone notes: “The operations are carried out by joint teams of the Mauritanian police and the Spanish Guardia Civil, and the individuals are then handed over to the National Security Department (emigration service).”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, while monitoring the [Ksar Detention Centre](#)<sup>12</sup> in Nouakchott in 2024, an investigative journalism team from Lighthouse Reports “witnessed and filmed refugees and

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<sup>6</sup> Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, “North-West Passage: The Resurgence of Maritime Irregular Migration to the Canary Islands,” December 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Lucia-Bird-Canary-Island-December-2022.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Alarmphone, ““You Are No Longer Considered Human” – Incarceration of People on the Move on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route,” 6 May 2025, <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/05/06/you-are-no-longer-considered-human-incarceration-of-people-on-the-move-on-the-western-mediterranean-and-atlantic-route/>

<sup>8</sup> InfoMigrants, “Mauritania is Main Country of Departure for Migrants to Spain,” 27 May 2025, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/64796/mauritania-is-main-country-of-departure-for-migrants-to-spain>

<sup>9</sup> “Agreement between the Kingdom of Spain and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania on Immigration,” 1 July 2003, <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2003/08/04/pdfs/A30050-30053.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> European Council on Refugees and Exiles, “EU External Partners: EU Signs Latest Migration Deal with Mauritania — Frontex's Co-operation with Libyan Coast Guard Despite Evidence of Abuse Exposed,” 16 February 2024, <https://ecre.org/eu-external-partners-eu-signs-latest-migration-deal-with-mauritania-%E2%80%95-frontexs-co-operation-with-libyan-coast-guard-despite-evidence-of-abuse-exposed/>

<sup>11</sup> Alarmphone, ““You Are No Longer Considered Human” – Incarceration of People on the Move on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route,” 6 May 2025, <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/05/06/you-are-no-longer-considered-human-incarceration-of-people-on-the-move-on-the-western-mediterranean-and-atlantic-route/>

<sup>12</sup> According to an anonymous observer, this facility has now closed, and has instead been replaced by the nearby Dar Naim Centre in northwest Nouakchott. Anonymous Observer, Email correspondence with the Global Detention Project, 15 August 2025.

**Figure 1: Key Migration-Related Agreements Between the EU/Spain and Mauritania**

2003	Agreement between Spain and Mauritania on Migration (includes readmission)
2006	Joint Communique between Spain and Mauritania to strengthen joint migration controls (and agreement to help build and manage reception centres) <sup>13</sup>
2007	Agreement between Spain and Mauritania on regulation of labour migration flows between the two countries. <sup>14</sup>
2008	Spanish-Mauritanian Memorandum of Understanding re. migration control (surveillance and effective return) <sup>15</sup>
2015	Spanish-Mauritanian security cooperation agreement (included combating irregular migration and human trafficking), entry into force May 2018 <sup>16</sup>
2023	Samoa Agreement (between the EU and OACPS), for which “migration and mobility” is one of the agreement’s six “pillars” <sup>17</sup>
2024	EU-Mauritania Migration Partnership <sup>18</sup>
2024	Spain-Mauritania MoU on ‘circular migration’ <sup>19</sup>

migrants being brought to the centre in a large truck and Spanish police officers entering the detention centre on a regular basis.”<sup>20</sup>

According to the Mauritanian Association for Human Rights, these agreements “indirectly encourage repressive and inhumane practices on our territory, by transforming Mauritania into a bulwark against migratory flows. By outsourcing the management of migration, these states bear part of the responsibility for human rights violations committed in Mauritania.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Reuters, “AT SEA/MAURITANIA: Spain and Mauritania join forces to stem migrant flow after growing number of migrant deaths,” 18 March 2006, <https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/348688>

<sup>14</sup> IOM, “Agreement between the Kingdom of Spain and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania on regulation of labour migration flows between the two countries,” 25 July 2007, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/agreement-between-kingdom-spain-and-islamic-republic-mauritania-regulation>

<sup>15</sup> Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEA(R)), “Border Externalisation and Migration Control in Mauritania: Risks for Development Cooperation,” 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEA(R)), “Border Externalisation and Migration Control in Mauritania: Risks for Development Cooperation,” 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Italian Institute for International Political Studies, “Mauritania and the European Union: A Paradox of Proximity,” 23 July 2024, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/mauritania-and-the-european-union-a-paradox-of-proximity-181480>

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, “EU-Mauritania Joint Migration Partnership,” 8 March 2024, [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/eu-mauritania-joint-declaration\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/eu-mauritania-joint-declaration_en)

<sup>19</sup> La Voz, “Spain Promotes Circular Migration with Mauritania to Try to Stop Irregular Flows,” 28 August 2024, [https://www.lavozdelanzarote.com/en/canary-islands/spain-promotes-circular-migration-with-mauritania-to-try-to-stop-irregular-flows\\_228886\\_102.html](https://www.lavozdelanzarote.com/en/canary-islands/spain-promotes-circular-migration-with-mauritania-to-try-to-stop-irregular-flows_228886_102.html)

<sup>20</sup> El Pais, “Banished to the Desert,” 1 June 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-06-01/mass-arrests-and-forced-transfers-how-migrants-are-exiled-in-north-africa-with-european-money.html>

<sup>21</sup> Mauritanian Association for Human Rights (AMDH), “Declaration of Indignation by the Mauritanian Association for Human Rights,” 10 March 2025, Migreurop, [https://migreurop.org/article3381.html?lang\\_article=en](https://migreurop.org/article3381.html?lang_article=en)

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** Given the Special Rapporteur's recent efforts to produce a thematic study on the human rights impact of the externalisation of migration controls, we think the Mauritania case offers an important case study on how the policy priorities of foreign governments can shape the trajectory of another country's laws and practices. We thus encourage the Special Rapporteur:
- to carefully interrogate the relationship between Mauritania and Spain and the European Union, with a view to proposing measures that more closely align with the responsibilities of Mauritania.
  - to remind Mauritania that any migration management agreements it makes with other countries must align with its international legal responsibilities, including in particular the norms it has agreed to as a Member State of the UN Convention on Migrant Workers, which Spain and other EU countries have failed to ratify. This convention provides a set of norms that specifically protect the rights of migrant workers and their families, including from arbitrary arrest and detention (Articles 16-20).

## RELEVANT LEGISLATION

In 2024, under pressure from the EU, authorities introduced Act No. 2024-038 of 8 October 2024, amending Act No. 65-046 of 23 February 1965. Amongst the key changes introduced by the 2024 act were new penal provisions for irregular entry (including six months in prison for anyone entering Mauritania without passing through official crossing points).<sup>22</sup>

Of particular concern, the law also provides a legal basis for the “practice of automatic collective expulsions by administrative decision.”<sup>23</sup> According to Alarmphone, the act “aims to provide a framework for deprivations of freedom that are already taking place, such as “removal to the border,” which are in reality racist roundups in the neighbourhoods where Black people live and work.”<sup>24</sup>

In its response to the UN Committee on Migrant Workers' January 2025 List of Issues, Mauritania noted that “it is essential to clarify that [the Act] does not apply to migrant victims of trafficking, migrant children, or vulnerable persons. These categories of persons continue to benefit from the specific protections offered by Law No. 2010-021, which guarantees their non-refoulement and their treatment in accordance with the principles of international protection.”<sup>25</sup> Observers, however, have reported to the GDP that these protections are ignored in practice, as refugees registered with UNHCR and in possession of this paperwork have been amongst those to be detained and deported in recent operations. As one

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<sup>22</sup> Alarmphone, ““You Are No Longer Considered Human” – Incarceration of People on the Move on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route,” 6 May 2025, <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/05/06/you-are-no-longer-considered-human-incarceration-of-people-on-the-move-on-the-western-mediterranean-and-atlantic-route/>

<sup>23</sup> UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, “List of Issues in Relation to the Second Periodic Report of Mauritania, CMW/C/MRT/Q/2,” 8 January 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/CMW/C/MRT/Q/2>

<sup>24</sup> Alarmphone, ““You Are No Longer Considered Human” – Incarceration of People on the Move on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route,” 6 May 2025, <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/05/06/you-are-no-longer-considered-human-incarceration-of-people-on-the-move-on-the-western-mediterranean-and-atlantic-route/>

<sup>25</sup> Government of Mauritania, “Réponses de la Mauritanie à la liste de points concernant son deuxième rapport périodique, CMW/C/MRT/RQ/2,” 15 July 2025, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CMW%2FC%2FMRT%2FRQ%2F2&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolNo=CMW%2FC%2FMRT%2FRQ%2F2&Lang=en)



described: “Many refugees can’t exit their homes because of the fear of being arrested and deported.”<sup>26</sup> El Pais also reports that children are detained, having seen children in dozens of photos that its reporters had access to.<sup>27</sup>

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** We urge the Special Rapporteur to carefully interrogate the legal and policy situation during his visit, including in particular:
- Given the importance that has been placed on this issue by the Committee on Migrant Workers, we think that the Special Rapporteur should ask both government representatives and civil society observers the extent to which legal protections for vulnerable groups are respected or—as the case may be—violated during immigration and border enforcement procedures, in particular to ensure that children and other at-risk groups are never subjected to detention, refoulement, or other harmful enforcement measures.
  - Press the government to consider revising Act No. 2024-038 of 8 October 2024, amending Act No. 65-046 of 23, to ensure that it removes criminal punishments like imprisonment for minor immigration infractions such as unauthorised entry, so as to bring it line with its human rights obligations, as these are provided by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in its Revised Deliberation 5 on the deprivation of liberty of migrants, which states in paragraph 10: “The irregular entry and stay in a country by migrants should not be treated as a criminal offence, and the criminalization of irregular migration will therefore always exceed the legitimate interests of States in protecting their territories and regulating irregular migration flows.”

## **DETENTION AND DEPORTATION: EVIDENCE OF RIGHTS ABUSES**

**Amidst intense European pressure and involvement, large numbers of migrants have been subjected to arrest, detention, and forced expulsion in recent years—and particularly this year.**

Between July and November 2022, Mauritania ran a regularisation campaign, allowing undocumented migrants in the country to obtain free residence permits at a centre in Nouakchott. Approximately 140,000 migrants were reported to have regularised their status during this time.<sup>28</sup> However, a 2023 note from the European Council Presidency to the Working Party on External Aspects of Asylum and Migration estimated that at least 100,000 remained undocumented<sup>29</sup>—and this number is now likely to be significantly larger. Moreover, according to observers, some who applied for the permit never received their paperwork.<sup>30</sup> Since then, the government has viewed anyone without a residence permit or UNHCR-issued refugee card, or who has not entered the country through one of the official 89 border

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<sup>26</sup> Anonymous observer, Email correspondence with the GDP, 18 August 2025.

<sup>27</sup> El Pais, “Banished to the Desert,” 1 June 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-06-01/mass-arrests-and-forced-transfers-how-migrants-are-exiled-in-north-africa-with-european-money.html>

<sup>28</sup> Council of the European Union, “Note: Migratory Situation in Mauritania,” 27 September 2023, [https://migration-control.info/documents/130/Migratory\\_situation\\_in\\_Mauritania.pdf](https://migration-control.info/documents/130/Migratory_situation_in_Mauritania.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> Council of the European Union, “Note: Migratory Situation in Mauritania,” 27 September 2023, [https://migration-control.info/documents/130/Migratory\\_situation\\_in\\_Mauritania.pdf](https://migration-control.info/documents/130/Migratory_situation_in_Mauritania.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Migration-Control.info, “Detained, Deported, Abandoned: A Note on the Situation of Migrants in Mauritania,” 17 July 2025, <https://migration-control.info/en/blog/a-note-on-the-situation-of-migrants-in-mauritania/>



crossing points, as “irregular”—and thus as deportable.<sup>31</sup> This has included nationals from Niger, Mali, and Senegal—even though they are legally permitted to stay in Mauritania for 90 days before obtaining a residence permit. However, as we mentioned above, those in possession of valid paperwork such as UNHCR documents have also been arrested and deported.

This year, thousands of migrants have been arrested, detained in a variety of detention facilities, and expelled.<sup>32</sup> Between January and April, some 30,000 irregular migrants are reported to have been apprehended in sweeping raids targeting homes,<sup>33</sup> workplaces, and streets. According to Alarmphone, the Mauritanian police and the Spanish Guardia Civil jointly conduct these raids before handing them over to the National Security Department (emigration service).<sup>34</sup> They are subsequently reported to be detained in a variety of detention facilities. In Nouakchott, for example, observers have reported to us that detainees are initially held in one facility (such as the Dar Naim Centre or the Arafat Centre), before being moved to another (the Robinet 10 Centre in the city’s Cinquieme Quartier) from where they are deported. Observers report that detention can last for a few days, or up to a week, before they are deported.<sup>35</sup> Alternatively, some migrants manage to pay a sum to secure their release. However, as one observer reported to us, paying to secure release does nothing to protect against future detention.<sup>36</sup>

Thousands have also been forcibly expelled across the border into Mali and Senegal. According to the Mauritanian government, between 1 January and 25 May this year, 19,689 irregular migrants were expelled from the country.<sup>37</sup> While Mauritania’s Minister of Foreign Affairs has previously stated that deportations are “carried out with respect for human rights,”<sup>38</sup> there are numerous credible reports revealing cases of migrants being abused during forced removal operations. Al Jazeera, for example, noted in May this year that migrants had been “stripped of all their belongings, including their mobile phones” and “tortured” while in detention.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), “Statement from the National Human Rights Committee,” 26 March 2025, <https://cndh.mr/archives/32032>

<sup>32</sup> Migration-Control.info, “Detained, Deported, Abandoned: A Note on the Situation of Migrants in Mauritania,” 17 July 2025, <https://migration-control.info/en/blog/a-note-on-the-situation-of-migrants-in-mauritania/>

<sup>33</sup> According to Migration-Control.info, neighbourhoods like the Quartier Cinquieme in Nouakchott have been regularly targeted. Migration-Control.info, “Detained, Deported, Abandoned: A Note on the Situation of Migrants in Mauritania,” 17 July 2025, <https://migration-control.info/en/blog/a-note-on-the-situation-of-migrants-in-mauritania/>

<sup>34</sup> Alarmphone, ““You Are No Longer Considered Human” – Incarceration of People on the Move on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route,” 6 May 2025, <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/05/06/you-are-no-longer-considered-human-incarceration-of-people-on-the-move-on-the-western-mediterranean-and-atlantic-route/>

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous observer, Email correspondence with the GDP, 15 August 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous observer, Email correspondence with the GDP, 18 August 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Government of Mauritania, “Réponses de la Mauritanie à la liste de points concernant son deuxième rapport périodique, CMW/C/MRT/RQ/2,” 15 July 2025, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CMW%2FC%2FMRT%2FRQ%2F2&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CMW%2FC%2FMRT%2FRQ%2F2&Lang=en)

<sup>38</sup> DW, “Expulsions de migrants irréguliers, Nouakchott réagit,” 13 March 2025, <https://www.dw.com/fr/mauritanie-expulsion-des-migrants-ill%C3%A9gaux-de-mauritanie-mohamed-salem-ould-merzoug/a-71910537>

<sup>39</sup> S. Lawal, “‘Xenophobic’: Neighbours Outraged Over Mauritania’s Mass Migrant Pushback,” Al Jazeera, 16 May 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/16/xenophobic-neighbours-outraged-over-mauritanias-mass-migrant-pushback>

A Guinean migrant, who has been widely cited by media outlets, also described being arrested and beaten by police in the middle of the night, being held for three days in a police detention facility with no food or access to toilets, and being abandoned at the border with Senegal (in Rosso). He described himself and others wandering the streets “with nowhere to go.” Rosso has been the focus of several reports, as there are reportedly “hundreds” of migrants stranded and “in distress” on both sides of the border here. In late April InfoMigrants cited an aid worker stating that buses carrying 60 or 70 migrants were regularly arriving in Rosso.<sup>40</sup>

Based on the large number of reports and testimonies collected by professional journalists, civil society actors, and human rights practitioners, it seems abundantly clear that Mauritania is engaging in arbitrary migrant arrests, detentions, and deportations. This state of affairs is abetted by the lack of oversight of these enforcement actions in Mauritania. According to the Moroccan Association for Human Rights, the country’s enforcement campaign has been “carried out with brutality and disregard for fundamental rights, constitute a serious violation of human dignity and of the international and regional commitments made by our country.”<sup>41</sup>

- **RECOMMENDATIONS:** We urge the Special Rapporteur to recommend that Mauritania immediately carry out the following reforms in its immigration detention policies and practices:
- Ensure that all immigration-related detention measures, including those carried out along its borders, are fully reported by the arresting agency and promptly referred to judicial authorities for a review of the legality and appropriateness of detention measures in each individual case and only after an assessment of the viability of non-detention (or alternative to detention) measures are assessed.
  - Ensure that anyone who is slated to be detained or deported be carefully screened for health issues, age, and legal standing, and be provided access to legal assistance.
  - Ensure that at-risk individuals—including children, torture survivors, victims of trafficking, and asylum seekers—are removed from detention and/or their removal procedures cancelled, and that they be referred to appropriate social assistance agencies or services, including those provided by international humanitarian agencies like UNHCR.

## DETENTION FACILITIES

**Due to a lack of transparency surrounding detention practices in Mauritania, as well as the ad-hoc nature of many detentions, the GDP lacks comprehensive information on current facilities used for immigration detention. However, we have been able to document the use of a variety of sites, including prisons, details of which are provided below.**

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<sup>40</sup> InfoMigrants, “On the Senegal-Mauritania Border, Hundreds of Migrants in “in a Desperate Situation,” 30 March 2025, <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/64287/on-the-senegalmauritania-border-hundreds-of-migrants-are-in-a-desperate-situation>

<sup>41</sup> Mauritanian Association for Human Rights (AMDH), “Declaration of Indignation by the Mauritanian Association for Human Rights,” 10 March 2025, Migreurop, [https://migreurop.org/article3381.html?lang\\_article=en](https://migreurop.org/article3381.html?lang_article=en)

Reports regarding conditions inside facilities where migrants are held are conflicting. Mauritania's National Human Rights Commission noted in March 2025 that conditions in *“all detention centres for irregular migrants in Nouakchott”* were *“respectful, with access to food and clean drinking water provided...and the premises are well-ventilated and spacious. ... The migrants interviewed did not report being subjected to ill-treatment.”* However, at the same time, the Commission reminded authorities of the need to *“strengthen vigilant to ensure that detained migrants are treated with dignity, and prevent any resort to violence, ill-treatment or inhumane detention conditions [and] ensuring access to basic medical care, especially for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, children and the sick.”*<sup>42,43</sup>

At the same time, the GDP has received reports from observers in the country who shared testimonies from former detainees, presenting a particularly stark view of conditions inside detention centres, including abuse, lack of food (one observer told us that detainees are required to pay for their own food and drink), and “non-existent hygiene.”<sup>44</sup>

**Dar Naim Centre:** In 2024, [Ksar Detention Centre](#) in Nouakchott appeared to be one of the country's main immigration detention sites. That year, a consortium of media outlets investigating detention and deportation in the region highlighted the poor conditions in the centre. Images and videos that they received showed dark rooms with no furniture except beds (which often had no mattresses) and detainees forced to urinate in bottles. Testimonies also revealed that detainees—amongst them children—were deprived of adequate food and water, medical care, and lawyers. One detainee who spoke with the researchers said: “The police behaved very badly with us. They had no mercy.”<sup>45</sup> According to El Pais, “journalists on the ground have identified Spanish agents visiting these facilities.”<sup>46</sup>

As of August 2025, the Ksar facility has reportedly ceased operations and been replaced by the [Dar Naim Centre](#), in northwest Nouakchott, close to Nouakchott Central Prison. According to reports that we have received, living conditions in the facility are “inhumane”: food is extremely poor quality and in very limited supply.<sup>47</sup> **We would strongly encourage the Special Rapporteur to press for access to this facility, in order to conduct his own independent examination of conditions inside.**

**Cinquième Robinet 10:** According to several observers on the ground in Mauritania, an important detention facility currently in use is the [Cinquième Robinet 10](#) in Nouakchott (le Cinquième is the neighbourhood where most undocumented migrants reside). According to reports received by the GDP, this facility is used to hold detainees prior to their deportation

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<sup>42</sup> National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), “Statement from the National Human Rights Committee,” 26 March 2025, <https://cndh.mr/archives/32032>

<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting that while the National Human Rights Commission reports that it has been accredited with an A status for NHRIs, its level of independence has historically been challenged. In October 2018, the Subcommittee on Accreditation of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions recommended that it be downgraded to B status. See: MENA Rights Group, “State of Play of Civil and Political Rights in Mauritania,” 19 June 2019, [https://menarights.org/en/documents/mauritanie-rapport-alternatif#\\_ftn10](https://menarights.org/en/documents/mauritanie-rapport-alternatif#_ftn10)

<sup>44</sup> Anonymous observers, Email correspondence with the GDP, 15 and 18 August 2025.

<sup>45</sup> El Pais, “Banished to the Desert,” 1 June 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-06-01/mass-arrests-and-forced-transfers-how-migrants-are-exiled-in-north-africa-with-european-money.html>

<sup>46</sup> El Pais, “Banished to the Desert,” 1 June 2024, <https://english.elpais.com/international/2024-06-01/mass-arrests-and-forced-transfers-how-migrants-are-exiled-in-north-africa-with-european-money.html>

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous Observer, Email correspondence with the Global Detention Project, August 2025.

to the south of the country.<sup>48</sup> **As such, we would encourage the Special Rapporteur to seek access to the facility.**

**Prisons:** Following the closure of the Nouadhibou Detention Centre, foreign nationals were reportedly held in police stations—such as the Baghdad Police Station in Nouakchott. Prisons also appear to be used, despite international bodies including the UN Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) urging the country to ensure that detained migrant workers are separated from ordinary offenders.<sup>49</sup>

Following its first periodic review of Mauritania in 2016, the CMW recommended that the state party: *“Indicate in its next periodic report the number of migrants, disaggregated by age, sex and nationality and/or origin, who are currently in detention for infringing migration laws, specifying the location, average duration and conditions of their detention and providing information on the decisions rendered in their regard and on the steps taken to ensure that an alternative to detention is provided.”*<sup>50</sup>

In response, Mauritania reported in 2023 that *“A total of 343 foreign nationals are in detention. Of these persons, 11 are women and none are children, and 26 of the total are in prison because they were involved in migrant smuggling as smugglers, organizers or in some other capacity.”*<sup>51</sup> It subsequently listed 17 different prisons,<sup>52</sup> as well as a “Closed Centre for Children in Conflict with the Law” and “Isolation Centres.” According to Prison Insider, Mauritania operates a total of 23 prisons,<sup>53</sup> suggesting that authorities rely on a large proportion of the country’s entire prison network—if not its entire network—to hold persons for immigration-related reasons.

Conditions across the prison network are reported to be “harsh and life threatening primarily due to gross overcrowding and inadequate sanitary conditions.” In 2023, Dar Naim—the country’s largest prison—was described as operating at three times its capacity and featured unusable toilets (with detainees having to use containers to relieve themselves).<sup>54</sup>

**We would therefore encourage the Special Rapporteur to visit the following penal facilities, in order to determine the conditions that migrants experience while confined inside.**

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<sup>48</sup> Anonymous observers, Email correspondence with the GDP, 15 and 18 August 2025.

<sup>49</sup> UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, “Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Mauritania, CMW/C/MRT/CO/1,” 31 May 2016, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CMW%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CMW%2FCO%2F1&Lang=en)

<sup>50</sup> UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, “Second Periodic Report Submitted by Mauritania Under Article 73 of the Convention, Due in 2021, CMW/C/MRT/2” 26 May 2023, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4062542?v=pdf#files>

<sup>51</sup> UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, “Second Periodic Report Submitted by Mauritania Under Article 73 of the Convention, Due in 2021, CMW/C/MRT/2” 26 May 2023, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4062542?v=pdf#files>

<sup>52</sup> The locations of these 17 prisons were reported to be: Néma, Aioun, Kiffa, Kaédi, Aleg, Rosso, Atar, Nouadhibou, Tidjikja, Nbeika, Sélibabi, Zouerate, Birmougrein, Akjoujt, and Dar Naim, Centrale, and an unspecified “Women’s Prison.”

<sup>53</sup> Prison Insider, “Mauritania, 2024,” accessed 14 August 2025, <https://www.prison-insider.com/en/countryprofile/mauritanie-2024>

<sup>54</sup> U.S State Department, “2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Mauritania,” 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/mauritania/>

- Nouadhibou Prison
- Sélibabi Prison
- Dar Naim Prison

**Ad Hoc Detention Sites:** According to reports we have received, police stations and military bases are regularly used as ad hoc sites to temporarily detain migrants before their expulsion.

**Complexes Humanitaire d’Accueil Temporaire (Temporary Reception Humanitarian Complexes):** Under the POC Mauritania (Joint Operational Partnership)—a project which is intended to combat migrant smuggling and manage irregular migration in Mauritania, with funding from the European Union and implemented by the Spanish state-owned Fundación Internacional y para Iberoamérica de Administración y Políticas Públicas (FIIAPP) and the General Directorate of Police of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior<sup>55</sup>— two Temporary Reception Centres for Foreigners in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou are being rehabilitated for a budget of 500,000 EUR.<sup>56</sup>

These two centres are to hold 118 people between them (45 in Nouadhibou and 73 in Nouakchott) and are due to include “*separate dormitories for men and women, kitchens and dining rooms, hygiene and sports areas, and meeting spaces. The centers will be equipped with facilities for conducting personal interviews in conditions of confidentiality and security in order to properly process applications for international protection, and the requirements for recognition of international protection (European Asylum Support Office (EASO) standards).*”<sup>57</sup>

In May this year, FIIAPP stated that the centres are to be “equipped and governed by internal regulations based on the operation of the Temporary Reception Centres for Foreigners (CATE) in Spain.”<sup>58</sup> In May, a Mauritanian delegation visited the El Hierro CATE (having visited the Las Palmas CATE in 2024) in order to examine the centres’ working dynamics.

While there may be practices at Spain’s CATEs that offer improvements for Mauritania’s detention operations, we nevertheless think that this effort holds many risks. In particular, the CATEs function as fully secured detention centres governed by general police law, which the Spanish Ombudsman has criticised.<sup>59</sup> Managed by the National Police, maximum stay is 72 hours—with the sites supposedly aimed at facilitating identification of persons (recording personal data, finger printing, etc). CATEs have also been criticised for their conditions: the

<sup>55</sup> FIAP, “Le projet POC Mauritanie organise son deuxième comité de pilotage,” 19 October 2023, <https://www.fiap.gob.es/en/noticias/le-projet-poc-mauritanie-organise-son-deuxieme-comite-de-pilotage/>

<sup>56</sup> Alarmphone, ““You Are No Longer Considered Human” – Incarceration of People on the Move on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic Route,” 6 May 2025, <https://alarmphone.org/en/2025/05/06/you-are-no-longer-considered-human-incarceration-of-people-on-the-move-on-the-western-mediterranean-and-atlantic-route/>

<sup>57</sup> FIAPP, “Réhabilitation de deux centres d’accueil temporaire pour étrangers en situation irrégulière à Nouadhibou et Nouakchott,” 19 March 2024, <https://fiiapp.quentalstaging.com/en/noticias/rehabilitation-of-two-temporary-care-centers-for-undocumented-aliens-in-nouadhibou-and-nouakchott/>

<sup>58</sup> FIAPP, “Réhabilitation de deux centres d’accueil temporaire pour étrangers en situation irrégulière à Nouadhibou et Nouakchott,” 19 March 2024, <https://fiiapp.quentalstaging.com/en/noticias/rehabilitation-of-two-temporary-care-centers-for-undocumented-aliens-in-nouadhibou-and-nouakchott/>

<sup>59</sup> Defensor del Pueblo, Mecanismo Nacional de Prevención, “Informe anual 2023.” March 2024, [https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Informe\\_2023\\_MNP.pdf](https://www.defensordelpueblo.es/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Informe_2023_MNP.pdf)



CATE in Lanzarote, for example, has been described as not meeting “necessary conditions.”<sup>60</sup>

## ➤ RECOMMENDATIONS

- Request a full accounting from authorities of all sites used for immigration-related detention purposes, including: (1) a comprehensive list and locations of all such detention centres, including ad hoc sites; (2) the legal basis for operating these sites; (3) the agencies operating the sites; (4) the operating rules of procedures as well as health and regulations and provisions;
- Urge the country to adopt reforms that bring all their immigration detention operations in line with the country’s international legal responsibilities, taking into account the various provisions and norms listed by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention in its Revised Deliberation 5, specifically Section IX “detention facilities,” including notably:
  - **Paragraph 38:** “All detained migrants must be treated humanely and with respect for their inherent dignity. The conditions of their detention must be humane, appropriate and respectful, noting the non-punitive character of the detention in the course of migration proceedings. Detention conditions and treatment must not be such as to impede the ability to challenge the lawfulness of detention, and detention should not be used as a tool to discourage asylum applications.”
  - **Paragraph 44:** “The detention of asylum seekers or other irregular migrants must not take place in facilities such as police stations, remand institutions, prisons and other such facilities since these are designed for those within the realm of the criminal justice system. The mixing of migrants and other detainees who are held under the remit of the criminal justice system must not take place.”
  - **Paragraph 45:** “Whether a place where those held in the course of migration proceedings is a place of detention depends on whether the individuals held there are free to leave it at will or not. If not, irrespective of whether the facilities are labelled “shelters”, “guest houses”, “transit centres” “migrant stations” or anything else, these constitute places of deprivation of liberty and all the safeguards applicable to those held in detention must be fully respected.”
  - **Paragraph 46:** “If a State outsources the running of migration detention facilities to private companies or other entities, it remains responsible for the way such contractors carry out that delegation. The State in question cannot absolve itself of the responsibility for the way the private companies or other entities run such detention facilities, as a duty of care is owed by that State to those held in such detention.”

## ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Remind Mauritanian authorities that immigration detention is only to be used as a measure of last resort, when determined to be strictly necessary and proportionate in the light of an individual’s circumstances and for as short a period as possible.

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<sup>60</sup> La Voz de Lanzarote, “El Defensor del Pueblo sobre el CATE de Lanzarote: “No reúne las condiciones necesarias,”” 20 March 2023, [https://www.lavozdelanzarote.com/actualidad/politica/defensor-pueblo-sobre-cate-lanzarote-no-reune-condiciones-necesarias\\_217765\\_102.html](https://www.lavozdelanzarote.com/actualidad/politica/defensor-pueblo-sobre-cate-lanzarote-no-reune-condiciones-necesarias_217765_102.html)

- Urge the country to remove all children and other at-risk groups from immigration enforcements measures and to ensure that there is adequate screening of all apprehended migrants to ensure that vulnerable people are never detained and provided social assistance.
- Urge authorities to ensure that any individual subjected to immigration detention is afforded full due process guarantees, including the right to prompt judicial review of the lawfulness and necessity of their detention, access to legal and interpretation services, and clear and timely information about the reasons for their detention in a language they can understand.
- Call on Mauritania to ensure that conditions inside all facilities used for immigration-related reasons meet international human rights standards, including sufficient space and hygiene standards; access to appropriate medical services, food, and clean drinking water; and protection from abuse or other forms of mistreatment.
- Remind authorities that immigration detention should not be punitive in nature.
- Remind authorities that in law and practice, no one should be expelled, returned, or extradited to another country where there are substantial grounds for believing that they would be in danger of torture, and guarantee effective access to procedural safeguards, including the right to appeal removal decisions, with automatic suspensive effect.
- As Mauritania is seeking to improve its immigration procedures, including by learning about reception practices in Spain, we think that it is equally important for officials to carefully review relevant human rights guidelines to ensure that laws, policies and practices are in line with international norms. Relevant guidelines include:
  - **Working Group on Arbitrary Detention**, [Revised Deliberation No 5, on the deprivation of liberty of migrants \(2018\)](#)
  - **Committee on Migrants Workers**, [General Comment No. 5, on migrants' right to liberty \(2021\)](#)
  - **Committee on the Rights of the Child** and **Committee on Migrant Workers**, [Joint General Comment, on State obligations regarding the human rights of children in the context of international migration \(2017\)](#)