



MAURITANIA: ISSUES RELATED TO IMMIGRATION DETENTION

**SUBMISSION TO THE UN COMMITTEE
ON THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF
ALL MIGRANT WORKERS AND
MEMBERS OF THEIR FAMILIES**

41ST SESSION – DECEMBER 2025

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ABOUT THE GLOBAL DETENTION PROJECT (GDP)

The Global Detention Project (GDP) is committed to ending arbitrary and harmful migration-related detention practices around the world, and to ensuring respect for the fundamental human rights of all migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. To achieve this, we seek to:

- Increase public knowledge and awareness of immigration detention policies.
- Expand coverage of immigration detention by human rights monitoring bodies and other international agencies.
- Expand partnerships with local and international civil society organisations working to end arbitrary and harmful immigration detention practices.
- Strategically target research and advocacy so that it effectively challenges arbitrary and harmful detention laws and policies.

MAURITANIA: ISSUES RELATED TO THE DETENTION OF MIGRANTS

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The Global Detention Project welcomes the opportunity to provide this report on Mauritania to the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW) ahead of its 41st Session. The submission, which builds on findings from the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants' recent visit to Mauritania, focuses on key issues highlighted by the CMW in its list of issues on Mauritania with respect to the State party's immigration detention and deportation laws and practices.

1. CONTEXT

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.¹ 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 9,875.²

As the numbers of migrants attempting the dangerous sea journey increased, Spain and the EU have moved to intensify its 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.³ (See Figure 1, below.)

¹ 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."

² 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>

³ 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>

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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.

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 decade⁶—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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ The agreement specifically references European involvement in the country's practices—featuring wording including “enhanced cooperation between Mauritania and Frontex,” and

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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/>

⁶ 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>

⁷ 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/>

⁸ 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>

⁹ “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>

¹⁰ 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/>

“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).”¹¹ Similarly, while monitoring the [Ksar Detention Centre](#)¹² in Nouakchott in 2024, an investigative journalism team from Lighthouse Reports “witnessed and filmed refugees and migrants being brought to the centre in a large truck and Spanish police officers entering the detention centre on a regular basis.”¹³

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.”¹⁴

2. DETENTION-RELATED LEGISLATION

In 2024, under pressure from the EU, Mauritania introduced Act No. 2024-038 of 8 October 2024, amending Act No. 65-046 of 23 February 1965. The new Act continues to criminalise irregular entry and stay in the country, providing for prison sentences of two to six months for anyone entering Mauritania without passing through an official crossing point or residing irregularly in the country. (Those who provide aid and assistance to persons who enter the country irregularly are also liable to this punishment.)¹⁵

It is important to note, however, that there appears to be a significant discrepancy between law and practice. As Human Rights Watch documented between 2020 and 2024, migrants were “generally not prosecuted in Mauritania for irregular entry, stay, or exit; most were detained and rapidly expelled without legal procedures.”¹⁶

¹¹ 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/>

¹² 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.

¹³ 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>

¹⁴ 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

¹⁵ Journal Officiel de la Republique Islamique de Mauritanie, “Loi no. 2024-038/ P.R/ modifiant certaines dispositions de la loi n°65-046 du 23 février 196,” <https://www.msgg.gov.mr/sites/default/files/2024-11/J.O%201568%20F.pdf>

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, ““They Accused Me Of Trying To Go To Europe” – Migration Control Abuses and EU Externalization in Mauritania,” August 2025, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/08/mauritania0825%20web.pdf

The rapid expulsion of migrants, however, has effectively been validated by the new act, which provides that “any foreigner who commits one of the offenses ... is automatically expelled from the national territory” which, as the committee noted in its list of issues, provides a legal basis for the “automatic collective expulsions by administrative decision,” a practice that violates Mauritania’s human rights obligations.¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸

While the committee noted similar concerns in its List of Issues, the State party failed to provide details regarding any efforts to harmonise its national legislation with the provisions of the Convention.

Moreover, although it 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,”*¹⁹ observers have reported to the GDP that these protections are ignored in practice.

Refugees registered with UNHCR and in possession of this paperwork have been amongst those to be detained and deported in recent operations. As one observer described to the Global Detention Project: “Many refugees can’t exit their homes because of the fear of being arrested and deported.”²⁰

Following his visit to Mauritania in September 2025, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants also noted “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.”²¹

¹⁷ 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>

¹⁸ 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/>

¹⁹ 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

²⁰ Anonymous observer, Email correspondence with the GDP, 18 August 2025.

²¹ UN Special Procedures, “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,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20250912-eom-stm-sr-migrants-en.pdf>

El Pais also reports that children are detained, having seen children in dozens of photos that its reporters had access to,²² and the UN Special Rapporteur on migrants noted that “children—including unaccompanied minors—and women have also been expelled.”²³

3. DETENTION AND DEPORTATION: EVIDENCE OF RIGHTS ABUSES

Over the last two decades, efforts to detain and remove migrants in Mauritania have grown as pressure from Europe to stem migration flows has increased. However, these enforcement efforts have experienced a noticeable uptick in the last few years.

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.²⁴ 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 undocumented²⁵—and this number is now likely to be significantly larger. Moreover, according to observers, some who applied for the permit never received their paperwork.²⁶

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 crossing points, as “irregular”—and thus as deportable.²⁷ 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.

Thus far during 2025, thousands of non-nationals have been arrested, detained in a variety of detention facilities, and expelled.²⁸ According to the State party, 19,689 irregular migrants were arrested and deported between 1 January and 25 May 2025 alone.²⁹ Sub-Saharan

²² 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>

²³ UN Special Procedures, “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,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20250912-eom-stm-sr-migrants-en.pdf>

²⁴ Council of the European Union, “Note: Migratory Situation in Mauritania,” 27 September 2023, https://migration-control.info/documents/130/Migratory_situation_in_Mauritania.pdf

²⁵ Council of the European Union, “Note: Migratory Situation in Mauritania,” 27 September 2023, https://migration-control.info/documents/130/Migratory_situation_in_Mauritania.pdf

²⁶ 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/>

²⁷ National Human Rights Commission (CNDH), “Statement from the National Human Rights Committee,” 26 March 2025, <https://cndh.mr/archives/32032>

²⁸ 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/>

²⁹ 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

are disproportionately affected by removal efforts,³⁰ and reports describe apprehensions in sweeping raids targeting homes,³¹ 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).³²

There are numerous facilities used for detention purposes. 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 prior to deportation is often brief—often lasting a few days, or up to a week³³—leaving no possibility for detainees to appeal their removal. 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.³⁴

Following detention, thousands have been forcibly expelled across the border into Mali and Senegal. While Mauritania's Minister of Foreign Affairs has previously stated that deportations are “carried out with respect for human rights,”³⁵ 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.³⁶

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 have reportedly been “hundreds” of migrants stranded and “in distress” on both sides of the border here.

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 Mauritanian Association for Human Rights, the country's enforcement campaign has been “carried out with brutality and disregard for fundamental rights, constituting a serious

³⁰ UN Special Procedures, “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,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20250912-eom-stm-sr-migrants-en.pdf>

³¹ 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/>

³² 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/>

³³ Anonymous observer, Email correspondence with the GDP, 15 August 2025.

³⁴ Anonymous observer, Email correspondence with the GDP, 18 August 2025.

³⁵ 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>

³⁶ 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>

violation of human dignity and of the international and regional commitments made by our country.”³⁷

4. DETENTION FACILITIES

A lack of transparency surrounding detention practices in Mauritania, combined with the ad-hoc nature of many detentions, means that we lack comprehensive information on all the facilities currently being used to detain non-nationals for immigration-related reasons. However, the GDP has nevertheless documented the use of a variety of sites. These include: [Dar Naim Detention Centre](#), [Arafat Detention Center](#), and [Cinquième Robinet 10](#) (also referred to as the Sebkha detention facility) in Nouakchott³⁸ and Maison Blanche in Nouadhibou,³⁹ as well as prisons and ad hoc sites such as police stations and military bases.

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.”*⁴⁰

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.”*⁴¹ It subsequently listed 17 different prisons,⁴² 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,⁴³ suggesting that authorities rely on a large proportion of the country’s prison network—if not its entire network—to hold persons for immigration-related reasons.

The country has also established two new facilities, referred to as “Complexes Humanitaire d’Accueil Temporaire (Temporary Reception Humanitarian Complexes).” Under the POC

³⁷ 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

³⁸ Agence Mauritanienne d’Information, “L’équipe parlementaire sur les questions migratoires visite des centres pour migrants en situation irrégulière à Nouakchott,” 30 April 2025, <https://ami.mr/fr/archives/270018>

³⁹ UN Special Procedures, “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,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20250912-eom-stm-sr-migrants-en.pdf>

⁴⁰ 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>

⁴¹ 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>

⁴² 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.”

⁴³ Prison Insider, “Mauritania, 2024,” accessed 14 August 2025, <https://www.prison-insider.com/en/countryprofile/mauritanie-2024>

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 Interior⁴⁴—two centres in [Nouakchott](#) and [Nouadhibou](#) have been rehabilitated for a budget of 500,000 EUR.⁴⁵ According to Human Rights Watch, the two facilities are believed to be the former Baghdad centre in Nouakchott, and another former centre in Nouadhibou.⁴⁶

Described as “modernized infrastructure serving dignity and security,” these two centres hold 177 people between them (73 in Nouadhibou and 104 in Nouakchott)⁴⁷ and were officially handed over to Mauritanian authorities by the European Union (EU) on 16 October 2025.⁴⁸ Ahead of their opening, FIAPP noted that they 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).*”⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰ In May, a Mauritanian delegation visited the El Hierro CATE (having visited the Las Palmas CATE in 2024) in order to examine the centre’s working dynamics.

While there may be practices at Spain’s CATEs that offer improvements for Mauritania’s detention operations, the Global Detention Project nevertheless believes that this effort holds many risks. In particular, the CATEs function as fully secured detention centres governed by

⁴⁴ 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/>

⁴⁵ 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/>

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, ““They Accused Me Of Trying To Go To Europe” – Migration Control Abuses and EU Externalization in Mauritania,” August 2025, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/08/mauritania0825%20web.pdf

⁴⁷ Chezvlane, “Migration : remise officielle à la Police nationale mauritanienne de deux centres d’accueil temporaire de migrants débarqués (CATE) en Mauritanie,” 17 October 2025, https://www.chezvlane.com/Migration-remise-officielle-a-la-Police-nationale-mauritanienne-de-deux-centres-d-accueil-temporaire-de-migrants_a37489.html

⁴⁸ Delegation of the European Union to Mauritania, “L’Union européenne remet aux autorités de la République islamique de Mauritanie deux centres d’accueil temporaire pour les migrants débarqués,” 16 October 2025, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/mauritania/l%E2%80%99union-europ%C3%A9enne-remet-aux-autorit%C3%A9s-de-la-r%C3%A9publique-islamique-de-mauritanie-deux-centres-d_fr

⁴⁹ 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/>

⁵⁰ 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/>

general police law, which the Spanish Ombudsman has criticised.⁵¹ 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 CATE in Lanzarote, for example, has been described as not meeting “necessary conditions.”⁵²

4.a Conditions in Detention Facilities

Article 58 of the country’s Code of Criminal Procedures (2023) provides that “any person deprived of liberty by arrest or detention or any other form of deprivation of liberty must be treated in accordance with respect for human dignity. It is forbidden to mistreat them morally or physically or to detain them outside of the places legally designated for this purpose.”⁵³

However, conditions within the country’s various detention facilities are a serious cause for concern. Observers on the ground in the country have shared with the Global Detention Project testimonies from former detainees, presenting a stark view of conditions inside 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.”⁵⁴ In Dar Naim, conditions are reported to be “inhumane”, with food extremely poor quality and in very limited supply.⁵⁵ Photos shared by the Ministry of Interior following a parliamentary team visit to detention centres in Nouakchott show rooms crammed with thin mats or mattresses on the floor, and large numbers of persons in each room.⁵⁶ The Special Rapporteur on migrants also noted that “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.”⁵⁷

Meanwhile, 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

⁵¹ 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

⁵² 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

⁵³ Republique Islamique de Mauritanie, “Code de Procédure Pénale,” 2023, <https://procedures.gov.mr/uploads/basejuridiques/202311230901-Code%20de%20Proc%C3%A9dure%20P%C3%A9nale.pdf>

⁵⁴ Anonymous observers, Email correspondence with the GDP, 15 and 18 August 2025.

⁵⁵ Anonymous Observer, Email correspondence with the Global Detention Project, August 2025.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, Facebook Update, 30 April 2025, *accessed 30 October 2025*, <https://www.facebook.com/midecmauritanie/posts/pfbid0GmLmo8UgeymKPYGkHszZwcm4ABFxoAaCJiHCAv6ck9iq5FVLJCxkxhCr5fTEtKjnl?rdid=7nV40btbiIB0v9AT#>

⁵⁷ UN Special Procedures, “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,” <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/statements/20250912-eom-stm-sr-migrants-en.pdf>

capacity and featured unusable toilets (with detainees having to use containers to relieve themselves).⁵⁸

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the above information, and in line with articles 16 to 22 of the Convention, the Global Detention Project encourages the committee to issue the following recommendations:

- Cease the arbitrary arrest and detention of non-nationals and reform detention practices to ensure that immigration detention is only ever used as a measure of last resort.
- Release vulnerable individuals—such as children, torture survivors, victims of trafficking, and asylum seekers—from detention and cancel their removal orders. Instead, they must be referred to appropriate social assistance agencies or services, including those provided by international humanitarian agencies like UNHCR.
- Ensure that all immigration-related detention measures, including those carried out along the State party's 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 slated for detention or deportation is carefully screened for health issues, age, and legal standing, and is provided access to legal (and when necessary) translation assistance.
- Cease collective expulsions, instead ensuring individualised assessments and guaranteeing migrants their right to appeal removal decisions.
- Amend Act No. 2024-038 of 8 October 2024 to ensure that it removes criminal punishment like imprisonment for irregular entry and stay—in line with the committee's General Comment No.5 which affirms that irregular entry does not merit criminal sanctions.
- 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.

⁵⁸ 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/>