



# Mauritania

Bible Restrictions Rank: **5**  
**EXTREME ACCESS RESTRICTIONS**

Bible Shortage Rank: **70**  
**Bible needs estimate is less than ten thousand**



## An Overview of Bible access in Mauritania

Mauritania's Christian population makes up a small and deeply marginalized minority in this North African Islamic republic. With a population of nearly 5 million, only around 11,000 people identify as Christians—that's not even half a percent of the population. Not even 40% of believers have access to Bibles due to extreme restrictions. Most Christians are expats from Sub-Saharan Africa; while local believers, especially Muslim Background believers or MBBs, are few and must practice their faith in secrecy.

Access to the Bible in Mauritania is not simply limited; it is almost entirely restricted. The legal framework prohibits the importation, printing, storing, distribution, and even public display of Christian materials. While expatriates may quietly retain a personal Bible, owning multiple copies or attempting to share them can result in prosecution, with charges that, in some cases, carry the death penalty for proselytism or apostasy.

The government's firm stance is rooted in Mauritania's constitutional identity as an Islamic state. Apostasy is a criminal offense punishable by death. Even online access is closely monitored; while nearly half of the country has internet connectivity, the risk of being linked to online Christian activity can carry severe, life-altering consequences.

Socioeconomic hardship adds yet another layer. Over 30% of Mauritians live in poverty, and more than half endure multidimensional poverty. Christian communities, particularly Sub-Saharan migrants and local MBBs, often face compounded discrimination—not only due to their faith but also because of their ethnicity and outsider status. They are frequently denied access to jobs, medical care, or education for their children.

Before we continue, would you take a pause to pray for Mauritania?

### How can I pray for Mauritania?

- **For Unfettered Access to Scripture.** Let's pray for the small but steadfast community of believers in Mauritania—that they may find innovative ways to overcome the barriers to Bible access. That despite the stringent legal prohibitions, the Word of God will find its way into their hands and hearts, nurturing their faith and fellowship.
- **For the Body of Christ to Grow.** Pray that the Christian community in Mauritania, though growing modestly, will be bolstered by increased access to Bibles. Let's pray for the growth to accelerate as more Bibles become available.
- **For Divine Strategies in Bible Distribution.** Pray for those who are called to serve the Christian community in Mauritania, that they may be blessed with wisdom and creativity as they find new ways to access Scripture. Ask for God's protection over them as they seek ways to navigate through the legal and logistical challenges, ensuring that Bibles reach those who hunger for the Word.

After praying for Mauritania, continue reading on the next page to learn more.

### Bible Access Restrictions

#### Severe Access Restrictions

- No Importing
- No Printing
- No Storage
- Ownership restrictions
- No distribution

### Other Limiting Factors

#### Severe Other Factors

- Very poor
- Poor internet access
- Extremely poor infrastructure
- <50% of population access to electricity
- 50-70% literacy

### Bible Shortages Among Believers

Bible ownership is very low, **estimated** Bible need is <10 thousand

**Main religion:** Islam

**Country population:** 4,994,000

**Christian population:**

11,000, 0.22% of total population

**World Watch List:** #23

# WHAT'S BLOCKING BIBLE ACCESS IN MAURITANIA?

## A Nation Where Christianity Is Criminalized

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Mauritania identifies as an Islamic Republic, and its constitution declares Islam as the religion of its citizens. Under Mauritanian law, apostasy is punishable by death, and any activity perceived as proselytism is strictly prohibited. While private Bible ownership is not technically illegal, public distribution or use outside designated compounds is forbidden, making it nearly impossible for Christians, especially MBBs, to access Scripture without serious risk.

## MBBs Face Life-Threatening Pressure

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For indigenous Mauritians who choose to follow Christ, life becomes extremely precarious. MBBs face immense pressure from family, tribal elders, and their broader communities. Exposure can lead to social ostracization, loss of livelihood, forced marriages, or even expulsion from their homes. In some cases, MBBs feel compelled to flee the country entirely.

## Expatriate Christians Are Not Exempt

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Expatriate Christians, primarily from Sub-Saharan Africa, are permitted to worship within designated compounds, but even they are constrained by fears of being accused of proselytism. These Christians often face racial and religious discrimination in the workplace, in housing, and in accessing healthcare or education. Their gatherings are monitored, and building new churches or even renovating existing ones is heavily restricted.

## Poverty and Corruption Compound the Problem

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Economic hardship further limits access to Bibles. More than half the population lives in multidimensional poverty, and job opportunities are limited by nepotism and systemic corruption. Many Christians, especially foreign workers, lack the financial means to acquire Bibles even if they were available.

## Technology Access Remains Severely Limited

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Technological limitations also play a role. With internet penetration under 50%, and even lower in rural areas, access to digital Bibles is limited. Social media use is low and subject to surveillance, with individuals facing consequences for sharing or liking Christian content. Public displays of Christian faith, including wearing symbols or posting online, risk attracting accusations of blasphemy or apostasy, which can lead to arrest, mob violence, or worse.

# A Climate of Fear and Isolation

Altogether, Mauritania presents one of the harshest environments in the world for Bible access. Deep-seated religious restrictions, cultural taboos, and legal threats combine to keep Scripture far from the hands of those who seek it most.

## Unmasking the Forces That Restrict Bible Access in Mauritania

Mauritania	Islamic Oppression	Religious Nationalism	Ethno-religious hostility	Clan oppression	Christian denominational oppression	Communist and post-Communist oppression	Secular intolerance	Dictatorial paranoia	Organized corruption and crime	Reference
<b>Persecution Engines →</b>										<p>The more fully shaded the circle in orange, the stronger the level of persecution. The number of "+" signs indicates the frequency or intensity of the driving factors behind it.</p>
<b>Persecution Drivers ↓</b>	Very strong	Not at all	Strong	Strong	Not at all	Not at all	Not at all	Medium	Medium	
Government officials	++++		++++					+++	+++	
Ethnic group leaders	++++		++++	++++						
Non-Christian religious leaders	++++									
Christian religious leaders										
Violent religious groups	++++		+++	+++					+++	
Normal citizens	++++		++++	++++						
Extended family	+++++			++++						
Political parties										
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups										
Organized crime									+++	
Multilateral org. & Embassies										

In Mauritania, multiple forces of persecution converge to restrict Bible access, including **Islamic oppression, clan oppression, ethno-religious hostility, dictatorial paranoia**, and **organized corruption and crime**. These are driven by government officials, Islamic religious leaders, ethnic group leaders, violent religious groups, and even one’s own extended family and local community.

The World Watch List by Open Doors sheds light on the broader context of persecution of Christians. But now we have to ask the question: How does this affect Bible access? Furthermore, where can we pinpoint the problem so we can address the need and demand for Bibles in Mauritania?

## A CLOSER LOOK AT PERSECUTION ENGINES

A persecution engine is simply this: the source of persecution in the country. A persecution driver (or actor) is the one “driving” the persecution. Taking a closer look at these engines and drivers, in proper context, will give us insight on how we can solve the problems of Bible access in the country.



### Criminalizing Christianity and Fueling Hostility

Islamic Oppression is the most dominant persecution engine in Mauritania, where Islam is not just the state religion—it is the law and culture. The country operates under a Sharia-based penal code that includes capital punishment for apostasy. Although no recent executions have been reported, the law remains in force, serving as a powerful deterrent to conversion.

In December 2023, this pressure escalated dramatically. After a video of a Christian baptism was shared on social media, fifteen Mauritanian Christians, including leaders and their family members, were arrested. The arrests triggered widespread intimidation from radical Muslims, local communities, and the government, causing shock and fear throughout the small Christian community.

Furthermore, Muslim clerics regularly incite public hostility toward Christians. A notable example occurred in July 2023, when a 19-year-old student was arrested after allegedly submitting “blasphemous” content in her school exam. She remained in custody by year’s end, while Islamic leaders demanded her execution, pressuring the government to respond harshly.

This environment makes owning or distributing a Bible an act that can easily be interpreted as apostasy or proselytism—carrying life-threatening consequences.



### **Betrayal of Tribe and Bloodline**

In Mauritania’s tribal society, leaving Islam is not a personal decision; it is an offense against one’s entire lineage and ethnic identity. MBBs are viewed as bringing shame on their extended families and clans. The social cost is severe: expulsion from the home, loss of economic support, and permanent severance from tribal and community ties.

Conversion to Christianity often results in complete disownment, with family members pressuring MBBs to flee the country. This is particularly devastating in a society where survival is deeply tied to family networks and tribal support.

Additionally, clan leaders, particularly in regions with strong ethnic hierarchies and caste systems, are known to actively prevent any perceived Christian influence. Religious leaders who double as tribal authorities reinforce these boundaries, often declaring that Christianity is a threat to the purity and unity of the tribe.

As a result, accessing a Bible, even secretly, is viewed as a betrayal of one’s people and identity, leading many to hide or destroy their Scriptures for fear of exposure.



### **Racism Woven Into Religious Exclusion**

Ethno-religious hostility is fueled by the intertwining of race, religion, and class. In Mauritania, black Africans, especially Haratines (descendants of slaves), and Sub-Saharan migrants suffer daily discrimination. If they are Christians, the pressure increases drastically. They are denied access to jobs, healthcare, and education, and are frequently harassed simply for their faith and ethnicity.

Christian children of Sub-Saharan migrant workers are sometimes denied access to schools, particularly when their faith becomes known. Christian men are often excluded from formal employment, and women may face forced marriage if discovered to be Christian.

Meanwhile, Arab-Berber elites, who hold the bulk of political and religious power, continue to promote an “Arabization” campaign that leaves little room for ethnic or religious minorities. These tensions have deep historical roots but remain starkly visible in the government’s failure to protect Christian migrant workers, who remain especially vulnerable.

Bible distribution efforts are disproportionately hindered among these marginalized ethnic groups, where discrimination compounds the risks of faith-based materials being confiscated or destroyed.



### **Silencing Christianity to Appease the Islamic Majority**

The Mauritanian government operates under a tightly controlled semi-authoritarian regime. Though it held a peaceful presidential transition in 2019 and reelected President Ghazouani in June 2024, power remains concentrated in the hands of military elites.

Christianity, particularly when associated with Western influence, is seen as a political threat. The government routinely suppresses Christian expression to maintain favor with radical Islamic groups. After the 2019 election, the state further tightened its blasphemy and apostasy laws, a move widely understood to be aimed at securing the loyalty of conservative religious factions.

A high-profile example of this paranoia is the case of a particular blogger, who spent six years imprisoned for a post that challenged Islamic teachings. Though released in 2019, his case exposed how easily accusations of “Christianization” or blasphemy are used to silence dissent and faith expression.

The result is a nationwide fear of Scripture: any public display, conversation, or material related to the Bible can trigger suspicion, surveillance, and prosecution.



### **Systemic Injustice and Exploitation**

Corruption in Mauritania is not incidental; it is institutional. The political and business elite, often tied to military leadership, control access to resources and opportunities. For Christians—especially Sub-Saharan Africans or known MBBs—this means systemic exclusion.

Journalists exposing corruption face detention and defamation charges, and that importing or distributing Bibles is effectively blocked by red tape, bribes, and denial of legal status to non-Catholic Christian organizations.

In addition, criminal networks with Islamic ties reportedly participate in human trafficking and weapons smuggling. These groups view foreign Christians, particularly aid workers, as soft targets for kidnapping and extortion, particularly near the eastern border where jihadist groups like AQIM are active.

For Christians, this corruption closes legal channels for acquiring Bibles and forces believers to rely on informal, secret, and often dangerous means to obtain God’s Word.

# THE URGENT NEED FOR BIBLES IN MAURITANIA

With an estimated Christian population of just over 11,000 believers, the number of available Bibles is alarmingly low. To meet the spiritual needs of this community, a few thousand Bibles can already support growth and spark hope to believers in Mauritania. Even a single Bible can make a profound difference in a country where possession of Christian materials is both rare and extremely risky.

## Slow Growth That Can Accelerate Through More Bible Access

The Christian community in Mauritania is growing slowly. In the past five years, the church has expanded by an estimate of just 2%. This growth intensifies the demand for Scriptures—not just to disciple new believers, but to strengthen the faith of those who live under constant pressure. Converts from Islam often endure severe persecution, isolation from family, or even forced displacement. Without access to Scripture, their spiritual survival is jeopardized.

## Bible Formats For Unique Needs

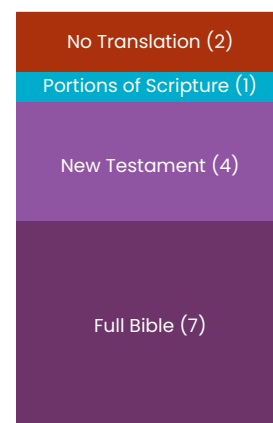
In this harsh environment, **audio Bibles** are the most strategic format. Many believers, particularly those in rural or low-literacy areas, rely on hearing God’s Word to understand and memorize it. **Printed Bibles** remain a close second, especially for use in private, discreet study.

## The Translation Gap

Mauritania’s Christians speak at least 14 languages. Of these languages:

- Only **7** have the Bible fully translated.
- **4** languages have only the New Testament
- **1** has just a portion of Scripture
- **2** languages still have no Bible translation at all

These gaps leave many believers unable to read God’s Word in their heart language, a crucial barrier to deep engagement and discipleship.



Spoken Languages with Believers in Mauritania

# THE CLARION CALL

The cry for Bibles in Mauritania is more than a logistical need—it's a call for hope, truth, and spiritual survival. Amidst pressure from Islamic extremists, tribal systems, and socio-political restrictions, Mauritania's small but resilient church continues to grow slowly. But growth without access to Scripture is fragile, even more so if the growth is small. If we are to support the spiritual flourishing of believers here, we must act now.

The global Church must rise to meet this moment. By investing in Bible translation, distribution in audio and print formats, and covert discipleship strategies, we can ensure that every believer in Mauritania receives the life-giving truth of Scripture.

The need is urgent. The time is now.



**0.4%**  
Annual Church  
Growth



Bibles needed for both  
**Believers  
& Seekers**



**<10k**  
Bible needs estimate



**Audio  
Bible**  
Preferred Format



**Printed  
Bible**  
Format: 2nd Priority