

Mauritania

March 2024

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

In 2023, Mauritania faced an influx of more than 55,000 arrivals, driven by the deteriorating security situation in neighboring Mali - a significant increase compared to 2022 (12,000 arrivals).

As of 29 February 2024, the Hodh Chargui region in south-eastern Mauritania, near the border with Mali, hosted an estimated 181,000 Malians, including 99,000 in Mbera Camp. UNHCR works closely with the Government of Mauritania and other partners to respond to this influx.

In 2024, UNHCR will continue to provide life-saving assistance to meet the needs of the most vulnerable refugees and host communities, while also investing in sustainable solutions aiming to promote resilience and increased self-reliance.

REGISTERED REFUGEES & ASYLUM-SEEKERS

FUNDING (AS OF 1 March 2024)

128,000

refugees and asylum-seekers in Mauritania

As of 29 February 2024

In Hodh Chargui region

In other regions

109,000

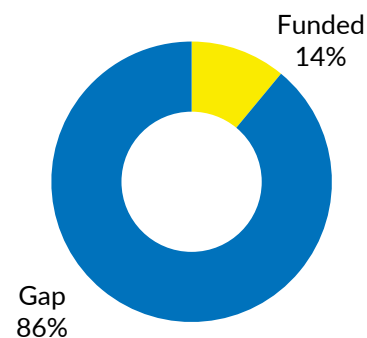
registered Malian refugees

19,000

registered refugees and asylum-seekers

USD 45.5 million

requested for the Mauritania Operation in 2024



ESTIMATED FIGURES IN HODH CHARGUI

est. 181,000

Malian refugees in Hodh Chargui

As of 29 February 2024

In Camp

Out-of-Camp

99,000

Malian refugees

82,000

Malian refugees



83%

women and children



75%

women and children

REGION OF ORIGIN

(as identified by key informants)



Operational Context

The deteriorating security situation in Mali, coupled with the withdrawal of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA), has triggered an **influx of 55,000 Malians** into Mauritania and pushed **8,000 Mauritians** who had settled in Mali to return in 2023. The majority of arrivals (41,000) have settled in over 90 locations in the Hodh Chargui region near the border, while 14,000 in Mbera camp, bring the camp's population to almost 100,000 people - far exceeding the camp's official capacity of 70,000.

In addition to the refugee population in Hodh Chargui, 19,000 refugees and asylum-seekers are currently registered in urban areas, particularly in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Arrival trends have continued throughout January and February 2024, with 19,000 new arrivals reported through the population monitoring flow exercise, bringing **the total number of displaced persons in Mauritania to over 200,000**.

While Malian refugees continue to benefit from prima facie recognition in Hodh Chargui, robust **registration** efforts within and beyond the camp are imperative, serving as a cornerstone for both protection measures and access to vital services.

2023 and 2024 arrivals have added a strain to a region already facing challenges such as multidimensional poverty, low education rates, limited basic services, and climate shocks. Many brought with them livestock heads (around 240,000), which further increase the pressure on natural resources, particularly water and pasture. Urgent humanitarian interventions are needed, particularly in support of the out-of-camp response, with a focus on protection, health, the environment and natural resources, water, food security and shelter.

Most sites where refugees are settling in Hodh Chargui are in remote areas and lack basic services: only 60% of the refugees residing in Hodh Chargui have access to government health centres within 15 km; many water sources are undrinkable; open defecation is widespread; and waste management is absent. The majority face food insecurity and 70% of households need shelter and core relief items. New arrivals have provided accounts of indiscriminate violence by armed actors and have cited horrific incidents, such as rape and executions. As a result, trauma is widespread among the newly displaced and there are enormous needs for psychosocial support. Protection risks include exploitation due to resource scarcity, lack of documentation, early marriages, school dropouts, and inadequate environmental and sanitary conditions.

UNHCR Response

With no foreseeable end in sight for the conflict in Mali, UNHCR continues to work with national, regional, and local authorities to support Malian refugees in Mauritania.

In collaboration with the government, UNHCR coordinates the multi-partner response for Malian refugees, applying the **Refugee Coordination Model (RCM)** in Hodh Chargui region. Anticipating the increased influx from Mali, since October 2023, UNHCR has been working with the government, UN agencies in the region and other partners to design and implement an out-of-camp emergency response in the region through the Refugee Coordination Model.

UNHCR together with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office led the elaboration of a 3-month contingency plan for Hodh Chargui. The plan - costed at USD 12.3 million - included actions from 24 partners and focused not only on responding to urgent needs of new arrivals (in and out of Mbera Camp) but also on ensuring a rapid transition from an emergency to a mid- to long-resilience response, in alignment with the UN Vision for the Hodh Chargui.

As most new arrivals are settling outside Mbera camp, the plan prioritizes an out-of-camp response, distinct yet complementary to the camp response. Therefore, since January 2024, UNHCR has put in place population flow monitoring systems that are informing the design and implementation of the out-of-camp response, which includes both refugee and host communities to ensure peaceful coexistence and social cohesion and is rooted in community-based and people-centred approaches.

For instance, UNHCR is working to strengthen the protection space for refugees in and outside of the camp by supporting government efforts to include refugees in the national education system through the development and implementation of the budgeted action plan for refugee inclusion linked to the National Plan for Development in the Education Sector (PNDSE III) and the update of social registry databases to ensure new arrivals are included in the government's social safety net (Tekavoul).

These efforts are also aligned with the pledges made by Mauritania at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 in the sectors of health, labour, documentation, asylum law, education, social protection and transforming Mbera camp into a climate-adapted human settlement.

Activities in 2024



Registration

UNHCR collaborates closely with the Ministry of Interior and National Civil Registry Agency (ANRPTS) to conduct registration of refugees and asylum-seekers **in urban and rural areas**. In Hodh Chargui, UNHCR supported ANRPTS in conducting mobile registration in remote locations such as Dwenkara, Adel Bagrou, Bousteilla, Djigueni, and Fereini. This initiative is designed to address the backlog in registration and streamline the issuance of National Identification Numbers (NNIs), essential to enable refugees' access to basic services, such as healthcare, and education.



Shelter

In Mbera camp, UNHCR is actively supporting local authorities in integrating the camp into regional urban planning. This includes the distribution of cash for shelter to enable new arrivals to build their own shelters from local materials that are suitable to the harsh weather conditions in the region.

Out-of-camp, UNHCR is also implementing the cash-for-shelter program and working with existing community structures that can support new arrivals.



Education

In Mbera camp, UNHCR initiated preparations for the transition from the Malian to the Mauritanian curriculum for the 2024/2025 academic year, including by offering capacity-building for teachers and strengthening Arabic classes available in schools in the camp.

Out-of-Camp, UNHCR through the Education Working Group collaborates with the national and regional education department to register refugee children in school and in the national education database (EMIS), distribute school kits and conduct awareness-raising activities with teachers on refugees' right to education and parents on the importance of education.



Cash Assistance

Since 2022, most vulnerable refugees have been included in the government's regular social safety net (Tekavoul) and benefit from cash transfers. However, according to the Minimum Expenditure Basket Study conducted in 2023 by UNHCR and GIZ under the ProNexus Project, the amount provided is not enough to cover all needs identified in Mbera camp. To address this gap and prevent harmful coping mechanisms, UNHCR provides multi-purpose cash assistance for refugees classified as extremely vulnerable, including refugees with specific needs, women and girls at risk and children at risk.

Additionally, as new arrivals put additional pressure on natural resources, UNHCR is also preparing to implement CBI interventions out of the camp and to scale up its Cash for Gas project with a view to reduce the use of charcoal and wood for cooking.



Water and Sanitation

In Mbera camp, UNHCR is actively involved in transferring services to public authorities, initiating the solarization of water systems, rehabilitating latrines and working with the government to enhance water networks. UNHCR also supports community-based structures in the camp working on waste collection and on the use of excrements from latrines in ongoing reforestation and gardening projects in the camp.

Out-of-camp, UNHCR's interventions include the rehabilitation/drilling of boreholes in host villages prioritized through participatory community planning exercises co-led by community leaders.



Livelihoods

In Hodh Chargui, UNHCR worked closely with Techghil (public employment agency) on four key areas of interventions in 2023: i) micro, small and medium enterprise development, ii) financial inclusion, iii) sustainable agriculture and iv) coordination and advocacy. As a result, 64 percent of 67 green income-generating activities supported by UNHCR in 2023 were female-led enterprises and the number of refugees with access to financial products in the camp, including bank accounts, increased from 2,400 (2022) to 5,600 (2023).



Health

In 2023, UNHCR and the Ministry of Health developed a roadmap for enhancing refugee inclusion in the national healthcare system and the quality and sustainability of services. UNHCR activities include awareness campaigns, supporting healthcare structures and mass vaccination campaigns and addressing malnutrition. In 2023, refugees benefited from close to 214,000 medical consultations with the support from UNHCR.

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