Refugee Influx Hodh Chargui - Mauritania

As of 23 December 2025

Overview

The security situation in Mali remains highly volatile, with intensified military operations, reported aerial strikes, and incidents targeting institutional assets continuing to drive displacement toward Mauritania.

This week, UNHCR and partners identified 1,103 newly arrived refugees (188 families) in Bassikounou and Néma, bringing the cumulative total to around 7,310 individuals (1,161 families) since the start of the influx on 24 October.

New arrivals are predominantly women and children, with an increase in older persons, particularly older women, and originate mainly from localities in the Timbuktu region of Mali. Refugees are increasingly dispersed across multiple villages and informal sites along the Hodh Chargui border, having crossed through numerous informal entry points, complicating identification, registration and assistance. Living conditions remain difficult, protection needs are significant, and rising pressures on host communities highlight the need for sustained protection monitoring and reinforced response capacities.

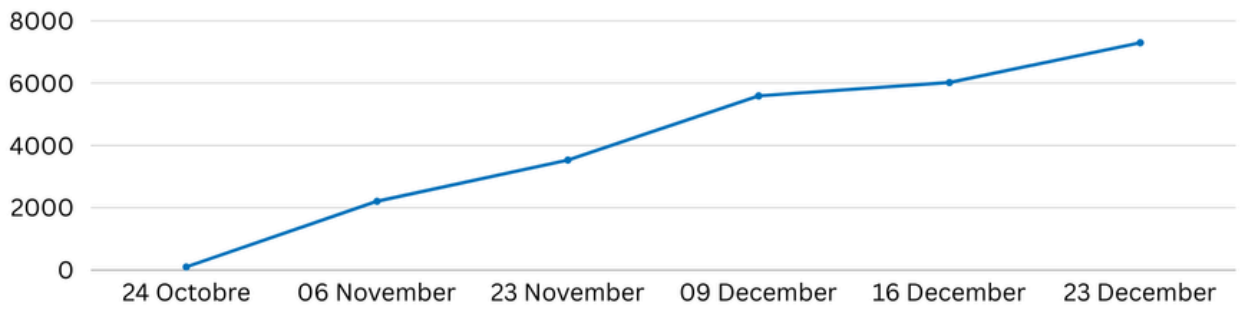
Key figures

7,310
Refugees arrived since 24th October

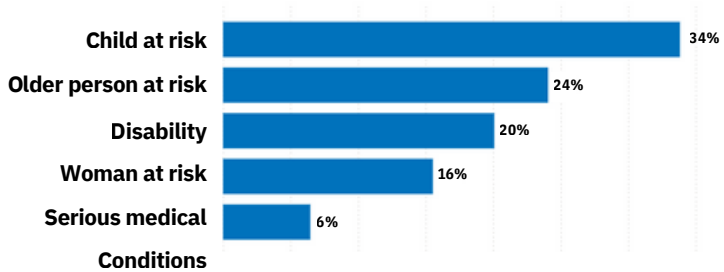
19%
Adult women

68%
Children

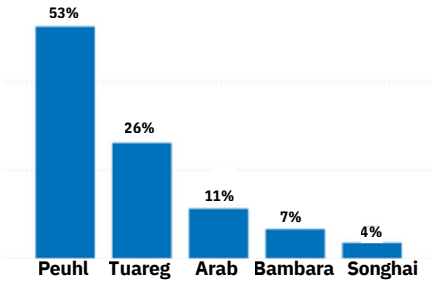
Estimated daily refugee arrivals



Vulnerabilities



Ethnicity



© UNHCR/Bertrand Hamassi Diabe – Refugee women and children await the distribution of essential household items during a UNHCR-led relief operation, implemented with partners, in Djigueni, southeastern Mauritania.

The security situation in Mali remains highly volatile and continues to have serious implications for civilian populations and cross-border movements. According to information from key informants and recent protection monitoring by UNHCR and partners in Mali, insecurity has intensified in several areas, particularly around Nampala, where reported aerial bombardments have triggered population movements. Civilians, including women, have fled in search of safety, with some crossing into Mauritania, notably toward border localities such as Seredouba, Sondage, and Hassi Tiwil.

More broadly, large-scale military operations involving increased airstrikes are reported across multiple regions in Mali aimed at countering armed groups and securing strategic supply routes. While described as targeted, these operations continue to have significant repercussions on civilian populations, contributing to a deteriorating protection environment, disruption of livelihoods and forced displacement.

During this week, protection monitoring in Mali documented 84 protection incidents, including abductions, extortion and conflict-related sexual violence, primarily in the Niafunké area. In parallel, armed groups are reported to be imposing zakat on farmers during the harvest period, further exacerbating economic pressures on households. This situation, combined with the blockade of Léré, has contributed to rising prices of food commodities and fuel, while fuel shortages continue to affect telecommunications and health facilities, limiting access to essential services and medical supplies.

©DW– From an Deutsche Welle report documenting the testimony of a Malian woman who fled violence.

An unnamed woman who fled violence in Mali told Deutsche Welle about the life-threatening conditions that forced her to flee, sharing the difficult journey of her displacement.

"We were all scared. I had heart palpitations, my heart was racing.

A concerning evolution in security trends has also been observed, with incidents targeting health workers, including reports of physical violence attributed to armed actors. In the Timbuktu region, a recent incident in which a Burkinabè aircraft transporting an official delegation was reportedly targeted further illustrates the persistent capacity of armed groups to strike institutional targets. These developments confirm the continued deterioration of the security environment in Mali and its direct spillover effects along the Mauritanian border, increasing the risk of additional refugee movements and reinforcing the need for sustained protection monitoring and humanitarian preparedness in reception areas.

This week, UNHCR and partners in Mauritania identified approximately 1,103 newly arrived refugees (188 families) in Bassikounou and Néma, with a smaller proportion arriving at Mbera camp. This brings the cumulative total to around 7,310 individuals (1,161 families) since the start of the influx on 24 October. The profile of newly arrived refugees remains consistent with previous weeks, with children estimated at approximately 68 per cent and women at around 19 per cent, alongside a higher proportion of older persons, particularly older women. Refugee families originate from various localities in the Timbuktu region of Mali, such as Razelma, Nampala, Timbuktu, and report first-time displacement to Mauritania, often arriving without assets or personal belongings. Several older persons reported delayed movement due to physical limitations, increasing exposure to protection risks along flight routes.

“I could not travel on foot,” one older woman explained. “My family waited because they did not want to leave me behind.”

Many households report lack of civil documentation, which, combined with recent arrival, geographical dispersion across remote villages, and limited access to registration points, continues to constrain access to protection and assistance. Protection needs remain significant, as barriers to accessing basic services persist, including distance to services, limited information on available assistance, and capacity constraints in reception areas.

Identification of newly arrived refugees remains ongoing, with UNHCR and partners currently identifying an average of approximately 700 individuals per week in Hodh Chargui. These figures are likely underestimates, as arrivals continue to take place across a wide geographic area and through multiple informal routes, often in remote and hard-to-reach locations. To date, refugees have been identified in at least 20 villages and localities of arrival, having crossed through a minimum of 13 entry points, the majority of which are informal border crossings. With existing capacities, identification efforts remain focused on the most accessible areas, suggesting that additional refugees may be arriving undetected, particularly in more remote border zones.

Areas of origin now span at least 12 localities across the Timbuktu, Ségou and Mopti regions of Mali, reflecting a progressive geographical expansion of displacement drivers linked to ongoing insecurity, military operations, and attacks affecting civilian areas and livelihoods. In Mauritania, refugees are increasingly dispersed across multiple villages and settlements in Hodh Chargui, including in Bassikounou, Néma, Adel Bargou and surrounding rural communes, alongside smaller numbers reaching Mbera camp. The approximately 800-kilometre border between Hodh Chargui and Mali, much of it porous and difficult to monitor, continues to pose significant challenges for timely identification, registration and delivery of assistance. Strengthened presence, monitoring and response capacities are therefore essential to ensure that newly arriving refugee

In addition to these challenges related, newly arrived refugees are facing difficult living conditions and heightened protection risks in Hodh Chargui. Many families are settling in remote villages or informal sites with limited access to shelter, water, food and basic services, often relying on already stretched host communities. At the same time, multiple assistance distributions currently taking place across the region in support of refugees who arrived earlier, are contributing to perceptions of unequal assistance, occasionally generating tensions with local communities and resistance to the arrival of new refugees. Competition over natural resources, particularly access to grazing land and herding routes, further compounds these dynamics in rural areas. Within this context, the protection environment for newly arrived refugees remains fragile, requiring sustained monitoring of social cohesion and peaceful coexistence, together with inclusive, protection-sensitive assistance and timely protection interventions.

As movements into Hodh Chargui continue and displacement patterns become increasingly dispersed, UNHCR and partners are operating at the limits of existing capacities to identify, register and assist newly arriving refugees across remote border areas. While efforts are ongoing, the scale, geographic spread and complexity of arrivals are placing sustained pressure on response systems. Additional and timely support will be critical to expand outreach and monitoring, strengthen registration and protection services, and ensure that both refugees and host communities continue to receive adequate, protection-sensitive assistance.