Route-Based Approach – Mauritania (2025 Overview)

January 2026

CONTEXT

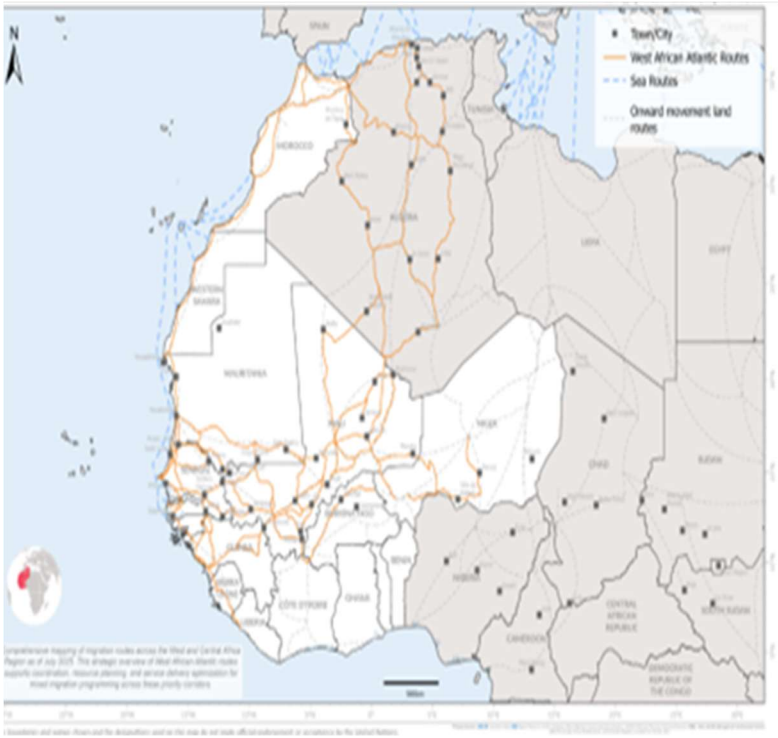
The Route-Based Approach (RBA) is a strategic, cross border response framework developed by UNHCR and IOM to better understand and address mixed movements along key routes. It aims to provide protection earlier, enhancing the resilience of populations and reducing reliance on dangerous journeys and irregular movements. In order to achieve these objectives, the approach is structured around six core pillars, supported in the context of the enablers. Mauritania is located on the West African Atlantic Route (WAAR), along with: Morocco, the Western Sahara, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Senegal and The Gambia, the destination being Spanish territory via the Canary Islands.

UNHCR MAURITANIA'S PRIORITIES

1. Strengthen access to protection and assistance along key routes through enhanced identification and referrals
2. Improve data and analysis regarding international protection needs amongst those in mixed movements
3. Strategic communication and transparency to raise awareness about the risks and alternatives to irregular onward movements
4. Increase partnership legal actors (e.g. legal clinics, law faculty, Bar Association) to promote equal access to information and legal counselling

CORE PILLARS OF THE RBA

1. Protection sensitive entry and admission
2. Asylum systems and migration management
3. Protection and assistance, anti-trafficking
4. Inclusion and development
5. Safe, regular, and complementary pathways
6. Return, voluntary repatriation and reintegration



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WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- Mauritanian Authorities
- International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
- French Red Cross (CRF)

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

Overview

- Mixed migration from Africa to North Africa and Europe is primarily managed by **government measures**: arrests, detentions, expulsions, and disembarkations, affecting people with protection needs
- **Protection space is deteriorating**, with acute humanitarian needs and limited access to basic services exacerbating vulnerability

Sea Movements

- **2024**: 46,056 arrivals to Canary Islands, including 12,895 Malians
- **2025**: 16,886 arrivals (-60%), including 5,188 Malians; decline linked to EU-Mauritania bilateral migration agreement
- **Mauritania departures**: 8,408 in 2025 vs 26,828 in 2024
- **Recorded deaths/missing at sea (2025)**: ~120; NGOs estimate **thousands more**
- **Disembarkations in Mauritania (2025)**: 4,500+ in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou

Policy and institutional support

- Mauritania upholds international obligations: **1951 Refugee Convention**, **OAU Convention (1969)**, and commitments from the **2023 Global Refugee Forum**
- Draft national **asylum law** under review with UNHCR input
- **Training of Trainers (TOT)** workshop (Dec 2025): 25 officials trained on asylum law, non-refoulement, and mixed movements
- **Migration partnership with EU** and cooperation with **FIAP** to strengthen protection-sensitive migration management

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Reception and Assistance

- **Nouakchott Temporary Reception Center (CATE)** opened in November 2025; ~350 individuals received
- **Nouadhibou CATE** opened in January 2026
- UNHCR **and CRF** provide identification, referrals, and protection support
- **350 officials trained** on protection and mixed movements
- **Route-Based Approach (RBA)** pilot mission conducted with UNHCR, IOM, and stakeholders

Legal Protection

- Following **Law No. 2024-038** concerning criminal measures related to immigration:
  - **1,500 refugees and asylum seekers** released with UNHCR/legal partner support
  - **100 cases** of confirmed or possible refoulement documented (Mali, Senegal)
- Rapid legal interventions, case monitoring, and referral pathways strengthened
- Community consultations inform protection responses

MAIN ACTIVITIES

Pillar 1: Protection sensitive entry and admission

- Monitoring access to Mauritania through cross-border missions
- Prevention and response to detentions and refoulement via awareness, identification, and protection monitoring
- Data collection to understand profiles and displacement trends and adapt interventions

Pillar 2 – Asylum Systems & Migration Management

- Strengthening government capacities in **asylum and migration management**
- Joint registration and documentation with **ANRPTS** (National Registry Agency) and capacity building for **CNCRPP** (National Consultative Commission on Refugees and Persons in Need of Protection)
- **Refugee Status Determination (RSD)**: 1,269 decisions in 2025
- Implementation of **SOPs for disembarkation** and opening of **Temporary Reception Centers (CATE)**
- Identification of **27 persons** with international protection needs following disembarkation, and facilitation of their release and access to assistance

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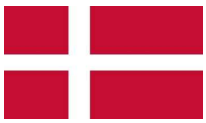
Pillar 3 – Protection, Assistance & Anti-Trafficking

- Adapted case management for **restricted protection space**
- Support to **community volunteers and initiatives**, including small grants and targeted training for **children, youth, at-risk women, and persons with specific needs**
- Coordination of **Community Protection Networks** along the route
- 24/7 **hotline and communication channels** processed 3,509 requests
- Mapping of services and awareness materials in **English, Arabic and French**
- December 2025: two **trainings on trafficking and international protection** for protection actors and community networks

Pillars 4,5 and 6 – Inclusion, Complementary Pathways & Durable Solutions

- Inclusion: Refugees access **social protection, education, health, and employment**
  - 2025: **88 students** supported through DAFI scholarships
- Resettlement: Identification of high-risk refugees
  - 2024: **75 resettled** (US, Netherlands, Canada, France)
  - 2025: 4 resettled to the US; 96 awaiting resettlements
- Complementary pathways: **education abroad, family reunification, professional mobility programs**
- Voluntary return: coordinated with IOM

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