Refugee Influx Hodh Chargui - Mauritania

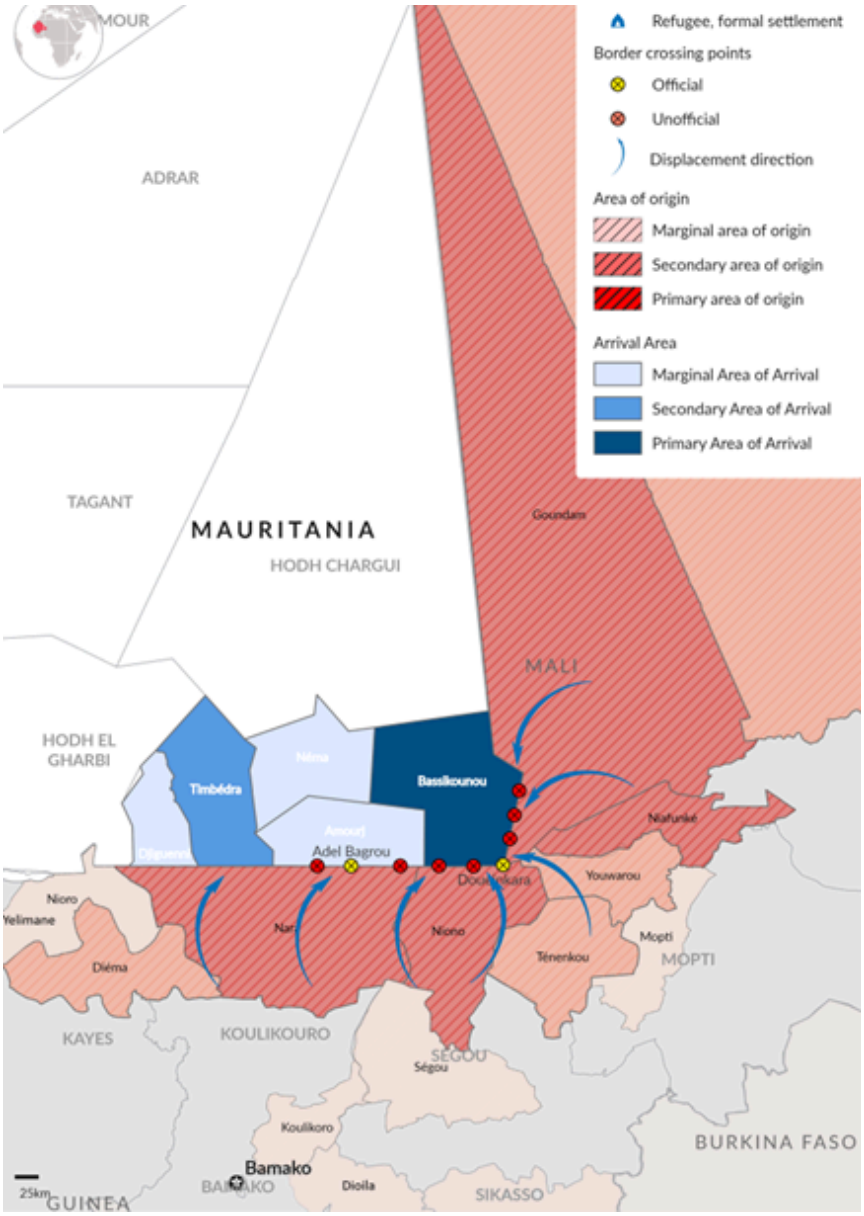
As of 16 April 2026

Overview

Insecurity in northern and central Mali continues to drive cross-border displacement into south-eastern Mauritania.

Between 9 March and 10 April, 616 new arrivals were identified, bringing the total to approximately 13,918 refugees since the beginning of the influx. Arrivals remain predominantly women and children, though a slight increase in adult men has been observed.

Refugees are settling in a highly dispersed manner across border villages, with low registration coverage limiting access to protection and assistance. Continued arrivals and constrained services heighten protection risks, underscoring the need to strengthen registration and outreach.



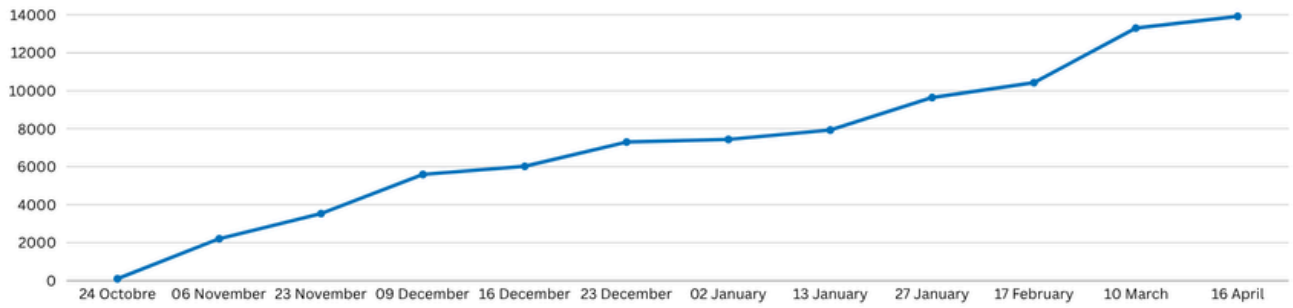
Key figures

13,918
Refugees arrived since 24th October

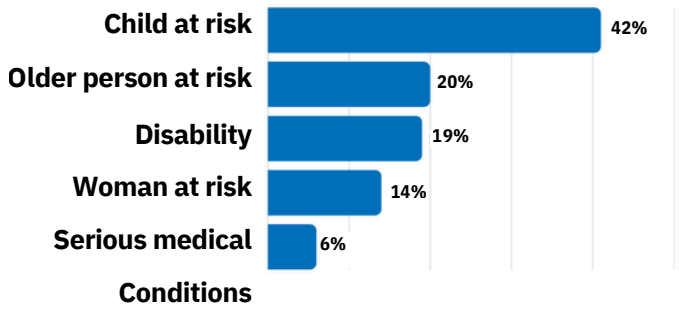
19%
Adult women

68%
Children

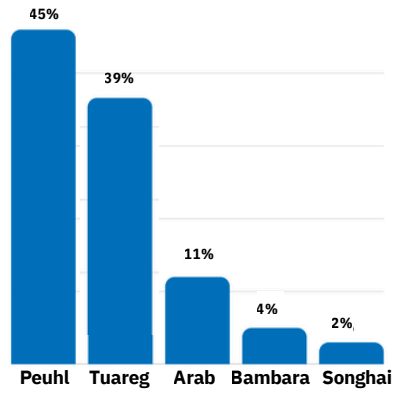
Estimated daily refugee arrivals



Vulnerabilities



Ethnicity



© UNHCR/OMAR DOUKALI. Maya Amadou Ba, a Malian refugee, sits inside her shelter in Mbera refugee camp, south-eastern Mauritania, after fleeing insecurity in Mali.

Maya Amadou Ba never imagined she would become a refugee. In Nampala, her life was built on work, dignity, and hope for the future. She wove fabrics by hand while her husband worked the land, and together they provided for their children and dreamed of better days ahead. Then insecurity swept through their community.

Men were increasingly targeted, and when the village chief urged families to leave while they still could, Maya knew there was no more time to wait. She gathered her children and fled, walking to a nearby village before continuing by cart for two days through heat, dust, and exhaustion toward Mauritania. At the border city of Vassala, her husband waited.

After weeks of fear and separation, the family was reunited, shaken but alive. They remained there for months before moving to Mbera refugee camp. Today, Maya is rebuilding her life in Mbera. The memories of that journey remain, but so does something stronger: the courage of a mother who refused to give up until her family was safe

Insecurity in northern and central Mali continued to deteriorate during the reporting period, driven by armed incidents, movements of armed groups and intensified military operations along key axes near the Mauritanian border. Civilians face growing risks linked to violence, restricted mobility and the erosion of livelihoods, prompting sustained cross-border displacement into south-eastern Mauritania.

Serious security incidents were reported near Nampala and in parts of the Timbuktu region, including Léré and Razelma, which are among the main areas of origin for newly arrived refugees. Attacks on civilian movements and market day incursions have resulted in abductions, civilian casualties and the destruction of economic assets. These incidents have heightened fear and undermined households' ability to remain safely in place. As one refugee explained, *"We used to know which roads were safe. Now, even going to the market puts your life at risk."*

The ongoing repositioning of armed actors along the border belt, combined with intensified military operations in late March and early April, has further contributed to an unpredictable and fluid security environment. Civilians have increasingly fled pre-emptively to avoid exposure to active fighting.
As one key informant noted, *"People are leaving before anything happens, because they expect it will."* Displacement is often not a single event: many newly arrived refugees report having been displaced multiple times within Mali, or returning after previous displacement, reflecting a pattern of repeated and increasingly constrained coping strategies.

© El País – From a recent El País report featuring testimonies from newly arrived refugees and remarks from the UNHCR Representative in Mauritania on emergency assistance, camp pressures, and repeated displacement following the recent refugee influx in south-eastern Mauritania.

"We saw people being beheaded. Even children."
a newly arrived refugee from Mali

More than 13,000 Malians have crossed into south-eastern Mauritania since October 2025, fleeing renewed violence in central Mali. Many arrive exhausted and traumatized, after walking for days with children, carrying only what they could save. Women and children make up the vast majority of new arrivals.

"Some are refugees for the third time,"
Says Tayyar Sukru Cansizoglu, UNHCR Representative in Mauritania.
***"When there is a brief period of calm, they return home and try to rebuild.* Then the violence begins again."**

Between 9 March and 10 April, partners identified 616 new arrivals (176 families) entering Mauritania, mainly through informal crossings along the Bassiknou and Néma axes. Since the onset of the influx in late October 2025, approximately 13,918 refugees (2,372 families) have been identified. The population remains predominantly family-based, with children accounting for around 68 per cent and women 19 per cent of arrivals, reinforcing child-specific and family protection concerns. Recent arrivals, however, show a slight increase in the proportion of adult men (around 20 per cent compared to approximately 13 per cent in earlier months).

Newly arrived refugees have settled across at least 16 villages in Hodh Chargui, often in remote, border-adjacent areas and through highly dispersed settlement patterns. Key locations such as Kleive, Douenkara, Kindjirle, Aghor, Néma and Timbedra continue to be identified across successive reporting periods as primary areas of settlement, reflecting both proximity to entry points and existing social and community networks. This pattern, observed over time, indicates the consolidation of these localities as key reception and settlement areas, while continued dispersion across smaller villages reduces population visibility and complicates the delivery of protection and assistance. "*For months we tried to continue living in our village," said a refugee woman who recently arrived in the Bassikounou area with her children after fleeing a village near Léré. "But the insecurity kept getting closer. We heard about attacks in nearby villages and people started leaving one after another. When we began seeing it with our own eyes, we knew we could not stay any longer. We travelled for several days before reaching the border.*"

Protection risks remain significant. Refugees report fleeing armed violence and repeated incidents affecting both safety and livelihoods. The high proportion of children and women underpins risks of family separation, limited access to basic services and exposure to exploitation and abuse, particularly in contexts of displacement, poverty and reduced oversight.

Registration gaps remain acute, with an estimated 70 per cent of newly identified refugees not yet registered by the Mauritanian authorities. Lack of registration significantly restricts access to protection services, assistance and documentation, while also hindering the identification and follow-up of individuals in need of protection support. Living conditions remain challenging, as most families arrive with minimal assets and rely on already overstretched generosity of host communities with limited infrastructure and services. While displacement in Hodh Chargui is not new, recent movements across the Mauritania–Mali border show that the situation remains dynamic and evolving, with families continuing to cross the border in search of safety.

Many of these arrivals take place in remote border areas where humanitarian presence is limited, meaning that some refugees may remain unidentified and without access to assistance for extended periods. As the situation develops, the capacity to reach, identify and support newly arrived refugees remains stretched, even as host communities continue to demonstrate solidarity despite their own limited resources. Ensuring that families seeking safety receive timely protection and assistance will require continued engagement and support as this situation continues to unfold along the Mauritania–Mali border.