

# Mauritania

15 March 2018

Mauritania hosts over **2,000 urban refugees and asylum-seekers** and more than **53,000 Malian refugees** in Mbera, a camp established in 2012 in the arid south-eastern region close to the Malian border.

Despite the conclusion of a peace agreement in 2015, **large-scale returns of Malian refugees are not expected** due to persistent violence in northern Mali. In February alone, **1,898 new arrivals** were registered in Mbera.

As the situation in northern Mali continues to be unstable, Mauritania struggles to cope with the growing needs of new refugees and the vulnerable host communities.

## KEY INDICATORS

**3,085**

New arrivals from Mali since January 2018

**No**

Voluntary returns to Mali facilitated in 2018

**4,876**

Malian refugees with **specific needs** (as of 28 February 2018)

## FUNDING (AS OF 28 FEBRUARY)

**USD 20.1 M**

requested for the UNHCR operation in Mauritania

**0% Funded**

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

Malian refugees in Mbera camp **53,512**

Urban refugees and asylum seekers **2,427**

A total of **55,939** people are assisted by UNHCR in Mauritania.



UNHCR Protection office in Mbera camp. © UNHCR/Helena Pes

# Update on Achievements

## Operational Context

In Mauritania, UNHCR provides protection and assistance to **53,512 Malian refugees** in **Mbera camp** in south-eastern Mauritania and to **1,615 urban refugees and 812 asylum-seekers** (mainly from the Central African Republic, Syria and Côte d'Ivoire) in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

UNHCR works closely with the Mauritanian authorities towards the **development and implementation of a national asylum system**. Pending the adoption of the asylum law, UNHCR supports the authorities to enhance refugee protection in Mauritania improving access to documentation, including birth registration, basic services, such as health, education, and economic opportunities.

Since 2012, UNHCR has led the **humanitarian response for Malian refugees** in the Hodh Echarghi region, in collaboration with the Mauritanian Government, which continues to keep its borders open to new influxes, and in cooperation with other UN agencies, national and international NGOs. Despite the conclusion of a peace agreement in Mali in June 2015, large-scale returns of refugees are not yet expected due to the security situation in northern Mali. In June 2016, Mauritania, Mali and UNHCR concluded a Tripartite Agreement for the voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees. This agreement will provide a framework to facilitate voluntary return, when the conditions in Mali will allow. In the meantime, it reaffirms the commitment of Mauritania and Mali to protect refugees. At recent meeting in Niamey (Niger), UNHCR reaffirmed the conditions in Mali are not conducive to promote return of refugees. However UNHCR may facilitate voluntary return under request on an individual case basis.



*The first national birth certificates are presented to a Malian refugee family at Mbera camp.*  
© UNHCR

## Achievements



### PROTECTION

#### Achievements and Impact

- Widespread insecurity in northern Mali continues to trigger significant waves of displacement into Mauritania. **1,898 new refugees** were registered in the month of February alone. Most families fled the Timbuktu and Mopti regions. They reported widespread insecurity, constant threats of death and kidnapping, extortions and summary executions by armed groups as the main reasons for fleeing Mali as well as lack of resources as a result of the deteriorating security situation, drought and lack of basic services.
- In a ground-breaking development for refugee protection in the country, the Mauritanian authorities have started issuing **birth certificates for some 7,600 Malian children** that were born to date in Mbera camp. They have also set up a system allowing for all new-borns in the camp to be directly registered from now on. The birth certification exercise was launched mid-February by the country's population registrar. UNHCR collaborates with authorities to strengthen their technical capacity for the civil registration of refugees. In this regard, a **new registration centre** was inaugurated in the border post of **Fassala** in February. UNHCR provided the centre with information technology equipment and training for the local authorities to quickly identify, register and refer refugees.
- UNHCR concluded a **new biometrics identity management system (BIMS)** to improve registration procedures in Nouakchott and Mbera camp. Each refugee's fingerprints and iris scans were collected and securely stored in UNHCR's online database to verify refugees' identity and family composition to improve data management and avoid losses of files, frauds or thefts. Within this exercise, **50,373 people** were verified and had their data updated in Mbera camp. The operations continue in Nouadhibou.
- In February, UNHCR conducted a meetings and assessments with refugees and asylum seekers both in Mbera camp and urban areas to ensure that all people of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing and are able to participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives and the lives of their family members and communities. This exercise is part of the systematic application of an Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) approach.
- UNHCR and its partner Intersos continue to work to protect children, prevent and fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Mbera camp. In February, two focus groups were organised involving 14 women community mobilisers and a listening session was held to discuss



*A mother and child who fled insecurity in northern Mali in early 2018 wait to see UNHCR officer in Mbera camp, Mauritania. More than 3,000 new arrivals from Mali have been registered in Mbera camp so far since January 2018. © UNHCR/ Helena Pes 2018*

the challenges of early marriages with 29 parents of SGBV survivors. Two football matches were held to raise awareness about child protection among the community.

- UNHCR Protection specialists provided protection training for **23 officers** of the Mauritanian National Consultative Commission for the Refugees (CNCR). This training was about refugee rights and asylum law.



#### DURABLE SOLUTIONS

##### Achievements and Impact

- In February, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary return to Bangui for eight Central Africans who expressed intention to return to their country of origin. UNHCR briefed them about the security situation and provided them with logistical support.



#### EDUCATION

##### Achievements and Impact

- In February, about **4,000 children** attended classes in the **six primary schools** of Mbera camp. Preparatory courses are still ongoing for **1,240 children** who did not pass their final exams. All teachers participated in a training about teaching methods. UNHCR and its partner Intersos continue to sensitize the community about the importance of girls' inclusion in education, which was the main theme of a sociocultural activity that was held in one of the six primary schools. **296 urban refugee** children currently attend school in Nouakchott.



#### HEALTH

##### Achievements and Impact

- **22 patients** from Mbera camp were referred to Kiffa, Nema and Nouakchott hospitals. UNHCR and its partner, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) ensure medical evacuations for secondary and tertiary medical cases of refugees and host community patients who cannot be treated in the camp or in Bassikounou. **320 urban refugees** received health assistance including check-ups, medical visits and surgeries.

##### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- MSF-Belgium, who is the main health actor in Mbera refugee camp, will terminate activities in Mauritania in September 2018. UNHCR is currently working with its partners, UN agencies and the Mauritanian Ministry of Health to identify potential health actors in order to respond to health needs in Mbera camp. Consequences of lack of health services in the camp would be dire.



## FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

### Achievements and Impact

- In February, due to funding gaps in WFP food pipelines, all refugees in Mbera camp received a cash component of the food distribution only. No food items were distributed this month.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Refugees in Mbera camp are overwhelmingly dependent on food assistance due to very scarce local resources. UNHCR works with partners to improve access to gardening fields and livestock to reduce refugees' dependency on food assistance. Development interventions are needed in the Hodh Echargui region to help both refugee and host communities to become more resilient.



## WATER AND SANITATION

### Achievements and Impact

- To promote hygiene and prevent the spread of water borne diseases, more than **8,000 people** were reached through sensitization activities to raise awareness of safe hygiene and spread proper hand washing practices such as public rallies, focus group discussions and door-to-door campaigns.

### Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- A progressive increase in water consumption has already been observed due to the raising heat in Mbera camp. Poor rains this year have sparked acute food insecurity and malnutrition in Mauritania, clawing back recovery from the devastating Sahel food crisis six years ago. The water system of the camp is still dependent on humanitarian assistance. An initial investment is needed to ensure a smooth transition from an emergency to more durable and sustainable water systems in Mbera camp and its surroundings.



## SHELTER AND NFIS

### Achievements and Impact

- To promote hygiene and prevent the spread of water borne diseases, all refugees in the camp received soap during February's general distribution.



## SELF RELIANCE AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

### Achievements and Impact

- To strengthen refugees' self-reliance, UNHCR and its partner SoS Desert support access to gardening for more than 1,600 vulnerable families.
- In partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNHCR also promotes certified vocational training in the field of renewable energy and construction in compressed earth bricks. In February, eight Malian refugees from Mbera camp and two urban refugees have started training under this programme.



*Training in brick construction in Nouakchott.  
© UNHCR / Mauritania.*

## Working in partnership

At the request of the Mauritanian Government, UNHCR coordinates the humanitarian response to the Malian refugee situation in close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization and local authorities. UNHCR also participates in the United Nations Country Team and Humanitarian Country Team and works closely with national and international NGOs.

UNHCR, jointly with the Mauritanian Government, representatives of UN agencies and international NGOs signed the 2018-2022 United Nations' Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (CPDD), which integrates humanitarian and development interventions and includes a strategy to strengthen peaceful coexistence and self-reliance for refugees and host communities in Mauritania's border areas.

## Financial Information

UNHCR has not yet received any contributions for the Mauritania operation in 2018. Funding will be crucial to ensure that basic needs for new arrivals will be met as well as protection and a safe asylum space for refugees. Lack of funding in 2018 is likely to have a negative impact on health, water and sanitation, nutrition and education in Mbera camp and urban areas.

## External / Donors Relations

### Special thanks to the major donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2018

Sweden (98 M) | Norway (43 M) | Netherlands (39 M) | United Kingdom (32 M) | Denmark (25 M) | Australia (19 M) | Switzerland (15 M) | Priv Donors Spain (13 M) | Italy (11 M)

### Thanks to other donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2018

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# Annex

## Breakdown of the main refugee groups in Mauritania



