

MAURITANIA

MARCH 2023

UNHCR provides protection and assistance to close to **92,000 Malian refugees*** in the region of Hodh Chargui where Mbera camp is located, and over **15,000 refugees and asylum seekers*** in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

Conditions in Mali are not conducive for large-scale returns, and the refugee population in Mbera camp continues to grow, reaching its peak in population since the camp was established in 2012. In 2022 alone, UNHCR registered **12,051 newly arrived Malian refugees**.

The Government of Mauritania has committed to a policy of **inclusion for refugees**. Accordingly, UNHCR is working with partners to build refugee resilience and strengthening **engagement with development actors** to enhance the capacity of national services.

POPULATION OF CONCERN*

108,190 refugees and asylum seekers

102,295 refugees
 5,895 asylum seekers

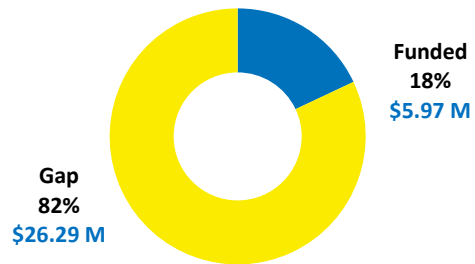
Mali	104,177
CAR	780
Syria	597
Sen.	466
Guinea	317
Others	1,853

* Refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR as of 31 March 2023. In Mauritania's south-eastern region of Hodh Chargui, there are 83,738 Malian refugees registered inside Mbera camp and 8,406 Malian refugees registered outside.

FUNDING (as of 31 March 2023)

\$32.26 million

requested for UNHCR's operation in Mauritania in 2023.



UNHCR IN MAURITANIA

Workforce:

- 57** National
- 23** International
- 40** Affiliate

Offices:

- 1** Country Office in Nouakchott
- 1** Sub Office in Bassikounou
- 1** Field Unit in Nouadhibou
- 1** Field Unit in Nema



Working in Partnership

- In close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, line ministries and local authorities, **UNHCR coordinates the multi-partner response for Malian refugees**, applying the Refugee Coordination Model in Mbera camp in south-eastern Mauritania near the border with Mali.¹
- UNHCR participates actively in the UN Country Team and supports the implementation of the **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF)**, which was recently extended until the end of 2023. UNHCR also takes part in UN and partner-led working groups established for protection, mixed movements, gender-based violence (GBV) and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and socioeconomic inclusion. Ongoing efforts are also being made to include Mbera camp in the climate action agenda (e.g. Great Green Wall initiative), especially in relation to reforestation, fire prevention and management and clean energy.
- UNHCR has deepened its **engagement with development actors** and partners such as the German Agency for Development Cooperation (GIZ) to support the Government of Mauritania in fulfilling its pledges towards the inclusion of refugees made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum². These partnerships underpin broader efforts by UNHCR to promote **inclusion in national systems** and **foster resilience** and **peaceful coexistence** within refugee and host communities.

Main Activities

Protection

- Thanks to Mauritania's longstanding open door policy, people in need of international protection can access territory, protection against refoulement and **refugee status determination (RSD)** procedures. While continuing to support the development of a national asylum law, UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization in 2022 to formalize its temporary role in RSD in urban areas.
- Mauritania's inter-ministerial decree of 2005 (which was updated in 2022) grants refugees to **access education, employment** and **social protection** on par with nationals. The updated decree also recognises the formal role of Mauritania's national registry, ANRPTS, in issuing refugees with national identity numbers, identity cards and machine-readable laissez-passers.
- In the south-eastern region of Hodh Chargui, Malian refugees continue to benefit from prima facie protection. Conditions in Mali are not yet conducive for large-scale return and the camp population, which reached 83,738 in March 2023 – the highest it has been since the camp's establishment in 2012.
- Following an influx during the first half of 2022, UNHCR registered 12,051 newly arrived Malian refugees in Mbera camp in 2022. New arrivals underwent a government pre-screening at Douankara (the official Mauritania-Mali border crossing point) and were registered at both UNHCR and ANRPTS using biometrics.
- From August - December 2022, UNHCR and ANRPTS registered 7,104 Malian refugees residing outside of Mbera camp in the Hodh Chargui region. This joint registration exercise covered eight localities (Amourj, Adel Bagrou, Bougadoum, Nema, Bousteila, Timbedra, Djigueni, Fereini).
- In urban areas, UNHCR has two systems in place for RSD: Malians who meet certain criteria go through a merged RSD process and receive a refugee certificate renewable after one year, while all other asylum seekers receive a certificate valid for six months first, and a refugee certificate once recognized as a refugee. Refugees registered with UNHCR in urban areas also registered with ANRPTS to access national identity

¹ For more details, please visit: [UNHCR, Stratégie de protection et solutions des réfugiés en Mauritanie](#)

² Mauritania's GRF pledges include the creation of a national asylum law, issuance of national identity numbers and cards to refugees, and refugee access to healthcare and the labour market on par with nationals.

numbers and refugee identity cards. UNHCR registered 5,541 individuals in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou in 2022; out of this population, 3,927 were recognized as refugees and 714 already received a national identification number from the government.

- Alongside registration and documentation, UNHCR ensures a comprehensive protection response for asylum seekers and refugees in Mauritania which is underpinned by strong community engagement. Individuals with specific needs receive targeted assistance, including **psychosocial counselling** and **cash assistance** to cover basic needs and health-related expenses.
- In Mbera camp, a traditional structure of refugee representation has been active for several years alongside a growing number of dynamic volunteer groups (e.g., brigades for waste management, fire prevention and management, environmental protection). Specialized programmes have been developed to raise awareness and strengthen capacity to prevent and respond to GBV, and to encourage and enable refugee children to access education. Accountability mechanisms, including in relation to PSEA, are also being enhanced.
- Equally important is UNHCR's collaboration with actors engaged in responses to **mixed movements**. UNHCR actively promotes respect for the principle of *non-refoulement* with Mauritanian authorities, including through targeted training activities. As such, in September 2022, UNHCR participated to a disembarkation simulation exercise in Nouadhibou organized by IOM in partnership with the EU, aiming at mainstreaming standards operational procedures on disembarkation. UNHCR works closely with IOM, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and national NGOs to ensure referral pathways are in place and functioning. UNHCR likewise advocates for **access to detention centres** to identify people with international protection needs. In 2022, 35 visits to detention centres in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou resulted in 99 individuals being released, registered and provided with documentation.

Inclusion and Resilience

- In 2021, close to 7,500 extremely vulnerable refugee households (representing 53 per cent of the total camp-based population) were included in the **national social protection programme** (*Tekavoul*). In 2022, the same registry enabled 7,200 refugees affected by severe flooding to be further included to the Government's shock-responsive social safety net for vulnerable households (*El Maouna*). In 2022, *Taazour* expanded the survey to 1,567 refugee households in Nouakchott and 186 in Nouadhibou. Based on this survey, the most vulnerable refugee households will be enrolled in the national social registry and related social protection programmes.
- Under the joint ProNexus project, UNHCR and GIZ work together to enhance stakeholder capacity to support the **socioeconomic inclusion of refugees**. In 2022, the National Agency for Employment (*Techghil*) was able to expand its services to refugees in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou and opened a new office in Bassikounou for refugees and host communities. So far, 3,357 camp-based and urban refugees are registered with Techghil, including 95 who have already benefitted from training to improve their employability (e.g., job search techniques, life skills, language) and 21 in Nouadhibou who have completed corporate internships.
- The Government of Mauritania's economic inclusion programme (*Al Baraka*) and the Agency for the promotion of credit unions (PROCAPEC) also expanded their services to refugees in 2022. A joint programme between *Techghil*, *Al Baraka* and PROCAPEC in Bassikounou enabled 200 individuals from the refugee and host population (123 Malian refugees and 79 Mauritians) to follow a ten day acceleration programme for entrepreneurs, which resulted in the sponsoring of 129 income generating activities that will facilitate **decent and durable livelihoods opportunities**, social protection, and financial inclusion. By engaging with and investing in national entities such as *Techghil* and *Al Baraka*, the ProNexus project ensures a shared focus on refugees and host communities, as well as greater reliance on national expertise and ownership.
- In line with its **global policies**, UNHCR continues to rely on and expand the use of **cash assistance** in Mbera camp and urban areas. In 2022, more than 90,000 refugees and individuals from the host communities of Amourj, Bassikounou, Nouadhibou and Nouakchott received multipurpose cash and cash for specific interventions related to livelihoods, domestic energy, shelter, education and hygiene.

Education

- There are more than 32,400 school-aged children in Mbera camp, where UNHCR co-leads with UNICEF the Education Working Group and supports **primary education** with stipends for school staff including 134 teachers, school infrastructure repairs and maintenance, capacity-building and broader advocacy and outreach. Additionally, 2,196 adults from the refugee and host communities were enrolled in literacy and math classes during the year.
- In urban areas, UNHCR and partners promote the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in the public school system. Targeted efforts are made to identify and increase enrolment and participation of out-of-school refugee children.
- 106 refugees benefitted from DAFI scholarships in 2022 to pursue university studies in Nouakchott thanks to the support of the EU, Germany and Denmark.

Environmental Protection

- With a population of more than 80,000 refugees, Mbera camp is among the largest settlements in Mauritania, and an exceedingly prone area to climatic shocks such as droughts and flooding. The majority of refugees rely on firewood and charcoal for domestic fuel, which has contributed to deforestation.
- In view of the foregoing, UNHCR has implemented **cash assistance** to incentivise refugee households to use liquified petroleum gas (LPG) in place of firewood. In this framework, 447 households and 17 small enterprises received cash payments aimed at addressing the demand and supply of LPG in a more sustainable manner. More than 96 per cent of targeted households purchased gas kits and began refilling their bottles. To gradually replace the use of firewood, UNHCR plans to standardize the use of LPG in the coming years.
- Efforts are also underway to reforest areas inside and around the camp. In 2022, UNHCR and partners supported local NGOs and refugee volunteer groups to plant 25,000 seedlings. These same refugee volunteer groups have also contributed to **fire prevention and management**, waste management, environmental education, and the protection of reforested areas.
- To **rehabilitate and protect the environment in refugee-hosting areas** and to promote social cohesion, UNHCR continues advocating for Mbera camp and surrounding villages to be included in the [Great Green Wall](#) initiative, and for agencies to develop concrete activities and interventions under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.
- The Mbera Fire Brigade, an all-volunteer group established by Malian refugees in 2018 to fight bushfires and protect the camp and the surrounding villages, [received the 2022 Nansen Refugee Award for Africa](#).

Multisector Response in Mbera camp

- UNHCR facilitates monthly **food and cash distributions** in collaboration with WFP.
- UNHCR, together with UNICEF and WFP, implement a targeted **nutrition programme** through the camp's four health structures.
- UNHCR ensures maintenance and optimization of the existing water system, construction and rehabilitation of semi-permanent latrines; collection, transport and treatment of solid waste; and the implementation of hygiene awareness-raising activities to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases. UNHCR relies on a World Bank-funded initiative that supports installations and repairs by government entities **to water management and sanitation systems**.
- UNHCR ensures the distribution and replacement of core relief items such as shelter kits, jerry cans, mosquito nets, as well as the distribution of hygiene kits for all refugees, mostly through cash assistance.
- UNHCR also ensures the **maintenance of roads and infrastructures** within the camp.

Return and Resettlement

- In September 2021, Mauritania joined Côte d'Ivoire and other countries hosting Ivorian refugees in the region in signing the **joint declaration leading to cessation of refugee status for Ivorian refugees situation**.³ UNHCR has since facilitated the voluntary return of 184 Ivoirians from Mauritania to Côte d'Ivoire in 2022.
- **Resettlement** remains a critical protection tool for the most vulnerable refugees in Mauritania. UNHCR made 123 resettlement submissions in 2022, with 30 individuals departing in 2022.

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³ For more details, please visit: [Abidjan joint declaration on the updated roadmap for comprehensive solutions for Ivorian refugees](#)