Cash for Shelter
Shelter assistance for newly arrived Malian refugees in Mauritania

In line with UNHCR’s efforts to provide safe and dignified housing to newly arrived refugees, the operation in Mauritania uses cash-based interventions (CBI) allowing refugees to invest in more permanent, safe and dignified shelter, avoiding duplication of in-kind support, and maximizing the coverage of needs.

The CBI modality to provide shelter for refugee households has many benefits. Refugees have greater ownership of their own shelter which builds self-reliance. As they purchase the needed material locally, they support the local economy which in turn contributes to their local integration, as well as peaceful coexistence with host communities.

Through its cash for shelter program, UNHCR provides unconditional and unrestricted assistance to enable households to construct or renovate their own shelter. Based on a market assessment and an agreement on standard prices for construction materials in consultation with the community in 2022, UNHCR provides each household with a lump sum of USD 350.
Maximizing the impact of donor funds, the cash for shelter project provides value for money. In comparison, in-kind shelter was costing UNHCR a lump sum of USD 500 in 2018 (including USD 150 for transport, storage and distribution of materials) with many logistical constraints compounded by poor infrastructure and the harsh climatic conditions on the ground: disruption of the social chain, degradation of construction material. The adoption of a Cash for Shelter strategy in 2018 has considerably increased the efficiency of UNHCR’s assistance: while only 62% of in-kind shelter costs used to go to beneficiaries directly, now refugee receive 95% of the cost.

METHODOLOGY

For each distribution, UNHCR and its partner select and enroll beneficiaries through home visits, also using UNHCR Biometric Identity Management System (BIMS) database, to prevent fraud and improve transparency. The shelter design was based on a standard Malian model, which Malian refugees have significant experience building pre-displacement. Selected households are provided with technical support to design and build shelters adapted to the refugees’ experience and knowledge prior to their displacement. A month after completion of the project, UNHCR conducts post distribution monitoring surveys with a sampling method using a list of beneficiary households.

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