

Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

31 December 2022

55,350 refugees live in Mahama refugee camp located in Kirehe District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

The camp was established in **2015**. **160 hectares** of land were allocated to host refugees. MINEMA administers the camp and is responsible for security and protection of the refugees in coordination with UNHCR.

50.7% of the camp's population is younger than 18 years old.



Refugee youth partaking in the inter-camp tournament, Mahama refugee camp



Refugee women's community member harvesting mushrooms, Mahama refugee

POPULATION OF CONCERN



Source: © UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency

55 UNHCR STAFF ARE BASED IN KIREHE SUB-OFFICE COVER THE NEEDS OF REFUGEES IN MAHAMA REFUGEE CAMP

Main Activities

Camp Coordination and Camp Management

- UNHCR and Rwandan Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) manage the camp through regular coordination meetings and multi-functional monitoring conducted on a quarterly basis. MINEMA staff including the camp manager, his deputy, as well as immigration staff and the police, work closely with UNHCR on a daily basis.
- Mahama camp is divided into two sites Mahama I and II for coordination purposes and proper allocation of services to refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern. In addition, the camp is divided into 18 villages.
- UNHCR works with nine implementing partners in Mahama camp; The Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) for camp management, ALIGHT for health, nutrition, and protection (SGBV), Save the Children International (SCI) for health, nutrition, and child protection, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for logistics and education, CARITAS for livelihoods, Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR) for community-based protection, Legal Aid Forum (LAF) for legal support, World Vision International (WVI) for WASH and environment and Humanity and Inclusion (HI) for Persons with Specific Needs (PSN).
- In addition, operational partners including Inkomoko, Maison Shalom, Red Cross Rwanda, Pro Femme, Indego, GIZ and Umutanguha microfinance provide support for refugees in the camp mainly in the livelihoods sector.
- UNHCR also works closely with other UN Agencies such as World Food Programme (WFP) for provision of food and cash assistance, UNICEF in education, UNFPA for reproductive health, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for sanitation, transportation, and health screening for resettlement cases.
- A refugee leadership structure is in place comprising of the 8 refugee executive committee members who oversees the quarters and village leadership structures.

Protection

- UNHCR and partners in Mahama refugee camp provide a range of protection services to refugees and the Rwandan host community. These include child protection, prevention, and response of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), community-based protection (CBP) and legal support. As the sector lead for protection, child protection and SGBV, UNHCR regularly holds coordination meetings for case management. For child protection, best interest assessments (BIAs) and best interest determination (BIDs) reports are conducted in collaboration with the International Commission for Red Cross (ICRC) for cross border tracing and reunification. In addition, the Rwandan Red Cross supports with family tracing and reunification activities. UNHCR and partners also conduct Town Hall Meetings with unaccompanied and separated children to discuss and address issues that affect them.
- Within Mahama, UNHCR and partners working in the protection sector have established a child protection safety network, which includes alternative care Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), child protection and GBV SOPs and a case management system, which ensures all protection activities are well coordinated. The child protection team also work in close collaboration with the district government, the National Commission for Children (NCC), MINEMA and DGIE.

- A birth registration system is in place in partnership with Legal Aid Forum to ensure that new babies are registered with district authorities and children grow up protected and able to enjoy their rights to essential services including health and education.
- To enhance CBP, refugee structures, including, peer support groups and children's clubs, are present in Mahama camp and supported by UNHCR. Through trainings, partners help refugees to identify, prevent, and address protection risks such as child neglect and family conflict within their own communities. There is a total of 141 refugee child protection groups dedicated to child protection in Mahama managed by SCI.
- In Mahama refugee camp there are 14 Youth and Child Friendly Spaces managed by SCI that enable youth and children to participate in recreational activities such as arts and crafts, reading, boardgames, online digital platforms for learning (tablets with child-friendly programs and child protection prevention messages), traditional dances and other outdoor sports such as football and basketball and volleyball.

Registration and Documentation

- In Mahama Camp, UNHCR maintains accurate data of refugees living in the camp through regular registration of individuals and groups. This is done through working with Government authorities at the camp level. Pre-registration interview counselling is conducted by UNHCR to ensure that refugees are aware of the purpose of registration. Persons with specific needs are identified during interviews and referred to protection staff as needed. Biometric enrolment is also being carried out by UNHCR in order to identify individuals who may have been registered previously as well as to detect fraud during registration. Refugees receive documentation from UNHCR at the end of the registration process which ensures access to further assistance.
- In December, 160 new-born babies and three new arrivals according to CRP decisions were registered in the UNHCR data base. In addition, 98 individuals were deactivated in the system for different reasons including resettlement, voluntary repatriations as well as death. 1,485 individuals who turned five years old were biometrically enrolled in UNHCR's database. 318 new proof of registration documents were also re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition.

Education

- Mahama refugee camp hosts the biggest school in Rwanda - Paysannat L, which accommodates more than 20,000 children from both the refugee camp and Rwandan host community. In 2019, due to the large number of students and to facilitate management, the school was divided into five campuses located both in the surrounding host community and within Mahama camp. Due to the vast number of students, the schools operate a double shift system for primary level where some students attend in the morning and others in the afternoon. In total 11,964 refugee children (6,031 boys and 5,933 girls) are enrolled in primary, while 4,593 (2,457 boys and 2,136 girls) attend secondary.
- In addition, 1,559 children attend home based Early Childhood Development, and 4,585 children aged between three to five years are enrolled in Early Childhood Development Centres in the camp.
- 899 refugee students from Mahama refugee camp are enrolled in secondary boarding schools across the country under different scholarships operated by UNHCR and partners, namely ADRA, Maison Shalom, Agahozo Shalom and Impact Hope.
- 984 students (543 male, 441 female) are enrolled also in universities across Rwanda. UNHCR supports university students to apply for scholarships through the Elite centre managed by

Masion Shalom and the Ideas Box centre managed by Humanity and Inclusion where they can access tablets, computers and connect to the internet to apply for tertiary education opportunities.

- UNHCR provides scholastic materials to all students in coordination with ADRA. An additional package is also provided to those attending boarding schools comprising of hygiene kits, clothes, and shoes to support their stay outside the camp. UNHCR also pays salaries for refugee teachers. UNHCR continued to advocate for integration of refugee teachers on government payroll. In partnership with WFP and school management, children are provided with hot meals at Paysannat L schools. UNHCR also supports connected learning through the Profuturo platform for upper primary students from level four to six and build teachers' teaching capacity in ICT.
- Due to a facilities, no science combinations are currently offered at the schools near the camps. In addition, the ECD centre comprising of ten classrooms is not operational due to lack of WASH facilities. To combat these issues, UNHCR has completed the construction of eight classrooms and begun the construction of 28 classrooms, although budgetary constraints challenge the construction of latrines and provision of technical equipment in classrooms.

Health and Nutrition

- Refugees have access to primary health care services from two health centres in Mahama camp. On average, 11,000 consultations are provided every month. Where additional treatment is needed, UNHCR facilitates and covers the costs of referrals to secondary and tertiary health care outside the camp. Pregnant women with complications will have access to Emergency Obstetric Care within Mahama II health centre in the coming months. 99% of deliveries are attended to by skilled health workers.
- Primary health care services provided in Mahama camp health centres in cooperation with Save the Children and ALIGHT include outpatient consultations, immunization for under five children and pregnant women, reproductive health, and HIV care services (including voluntary counselling and testing, prevention of maternal to child transmission and treatment care for people living with HIV), mental health care, malaria prevention and treatment basic and laboratory investigations. The most prevalent diseases include respiratory tract infections, skin diseases and watery diarrhoea. Epilepsy is the leading mental health condition.
- Nutrition services include routine screening and management of malnutrition through supplementary feeding programs for children under five years, pregnant and lactating mothers, and those living with HIV, are delivered by UNHCR and health partners.
- In Mahama refugee camp, 120 community health volunteers conduct community outreach programmes to promote positive health behaviours, promote healthy nutrition and assist case referrals to health facilities. Community health volunteers are also trained to treat common childhood illnesses in the community.

Food Security and Non-Food Items

- In Mahama refugee camp food assistance is provided by WFP through a monthly cash grant to refugees. Since June 2021, assistance has been delivered on a targeted basis whereby 83% of the population classified as highly vulnerable receive the full amount of 7,000 RWF per month while 8% who are classified as moderately vulnerable receive 3,500 RWF.
- A few refugee families, however, who do not yet have bank accounts or face issues withdrawing their monthly food assistance receive food in-kind such as maize, beans, cooking oil and salt.
- On a quarterly basis, UNHCR provides a cash grant for refugees who have a bank account to cover the cost of non-food items such as blankets, mattresses, jerry cans to collect water, kitchen equipment, soap, sanitary pads, and other hygiene items. The amount of assistance distributed varies depending on what items are targeted for the quarter.

Water and Sanitation (WASH)

- Water for Mahama refugee camp is obtained from the nearby Akagera River, treated at the permanent water treatment plant in the camp and distributed to the refugees through several water collection points. The available water supply is 23.3 litres per person per day which is well above the recommended minimum standard of 20 litres per person per day (daily average of clean water supplied to Mahama Camp: 1,356.7 m³ and 128.7 m³ to the host community).
- Mahama camp has 3,398 operational stances of communal latrines which also include showers. This equates to 17.1 persons per drop hole/ per shower room (against the standard of 20 persons). 1,006 durable hand washing stands to promote hygiene practices and 125 laundry slabs have been built in the camp. Three trucks to dislodge latrines and two garbage emptying trucks are available to take waste from the camp to the nearby dumping site. 894 m³ were dislodged from 110 blocks of latrine and 602 m³ of waste were removed from 50 garbage collection sites of the camp in December 2022.
- In Mahama camp hygiene promotion sessions are regularly conducted throughout the camp by a group of 127 refugee hygiene promoters. Through these activities including CBEHPP (Community Based Environmental and Hygiene Promotion Program), refugee communities are encouraged to adopt more hygienic practices.

Shelter

- Mahama refugee camp covers 160Ha of land and is the largest refugee camp in Rwanda. All refugees in the camp live in semi-permanent shelters with a total of 6,928 family shelters (a shelter is designed to accommodate two families). UNHCR supports refugee households to keep their shelter in good condition. In December, 10 families' shelters were repaired through community participation.
- UNHCR also distributes shelter repair material to refugees to help them repair their own homes and create a sense of ownership. Where needed, UNHCR directly supports more vulnerable refugee populations in undertaking the construction and maintenance.

Energy & Environment

- In 2018, the Government of Rwanda banned the use of firewood. As a result, UNHCR has provided stoves facilitating gas-powered clean cooking for about 18,239 households in Mahama camp, all transit and reception centres, and selected schools to support the school feeding program. The implementation of gas-powered stoves is estimated to reduce household air pollution by 90%.
- UNHCR Rwanda is part of the Refugee Environmental Protection (REP) Fund which invests in impactful reforestation and clean cooking programs in refugee situations around the world. As part of this, reforestation programs are ongoing in refugee camps across Rwanda, including in Mahama. As part of this initiative, in December, 10,554 trees (Jacaranda and senna spectabilis) were planted while 1,635 planted trees were sprayed with insecticide by refugee casual workers managed by World Vision International to prevent white flies.
- Under Productive Use of Energy (PUE) component, Practical Action in Renewable Energy for Refugees phase II (RE4R II) started to map livelihood development opportunities in Mahama camp and its host community. Under the Climate Resilient Farming (CRF) project, Practical Action has prepared a database for the Mahama Cereal and Llegumes Farmers Cooperative (MACLFACO) host community members and started the site selection of the compost pit for next season activities.

Livelihoods and Economic inclusion

- Mahama refugee camp contains three markets and refugees can also access a larger market located outside the camp run by both refugees and Rwandans. Many refugees operate small businesses at the markets providing income to support their families and increase self-reliance.
- Refugees in Mahama camp are provided with opportunities for self-reliance and supported to engage in livelihood opportunities. In December 2022, 1,135 refugees engaged in saving groups received loans from 1,135 saving groups and four from Umutanguha Microfinance; 251 individuals received first instalment of cash grant of 400,000 RFW each by PAC (Poverty Alleviation Coalition) project / World Vision.
- UNHCR alongside livelihood partners provides refugees in Mahama with entrepreneurship training. In December, 40 women artisans received income generating activities' management; 88 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) female graduates were trained on the soft skills and entrepreneurship before provision of start-up capital for income generating activities. Four youth groups also received a refresher training on savings model to promote financial inclusion.
- UNHCR works with a range of partners and financial institutions in Mahama camp who provide financial literacy training to refugee communities to subsequently benefit from loans. In December, for example, Umutanguha provided financial education training to 130 individuals and opened 82 accounts. Inkomoko also trained 163 individuals on Finance, Sales, Operation and Bookkeeping Practice, Business Registration, working with financial institutions, savings, Cash Flow Management and Inventory Management.
- Through the support of UNHCR and Maison Shalom, 40 refugee youth continued their seven month trainings on culinary art, and food and beverages at Giritika TVET school in December.

Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,310 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from the Mahama refugee camp. In December 2022, UNHCR assisted 36 families consisting of 76 refugees to return home, bringing the total to 651 Burundian refugee and 311 families returnees from Mahama camp in 2022. An additional 61 Burundians expressed their intention to return during the month of December 2022. For the Congolese refugee population returning home is currently not a possibility owing to the protracted unfavourable political and security dynamics prompted by continued armed fighting in Eastern DRC.
- A cumulative figure of 615 cases consisting of 2,177 individuals were identified for resettlement processing in December. By the end of 2022, Kirehe / Mahama had met allocated resettlement quotas for all countries offering resettlement to refugees in Rwanda. 296 refugees under the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) attended medical screening, and 55 refugees departed to USA, Canada, France, and Norway in December 2022.

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