

# Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

February 2023

**58,248** 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.

**50.2%** of the camp's population is younger than 18 years old.



Information campaign on targeted assistance in Mahama camp



Inter-Agency coordination meeting is conducted between UNHCR and partners working in Mahama

## POPULATION OF CONCERN



Source: © UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency

**47 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 to support programme coordination and the allocation of services to refugees, asylum seekers and others of concern. In addition, the camp is divided into 18 villages.
- UNHCR works with seven implementing partners in Mahama camp; The Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) for camp management, Save the Children International (SCI) for health, nutrition, SGBV and child protection, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for logistics, CARITAS for livelihoods, Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR) for community-based protection, and legal support, World Vision International (WVI) for Education, 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 Twese Hamwe, Indego Africa, GIZ, Practical Action and Umutanguha microfinance provide support to 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 8 refugee executive committee members, 9 quartier leaders and 18 village leaders who oversees the quartiers 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 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 the legal partner, Prison Fellowship Rwanda 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 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 February, 208 new-born babies were registered in the UNHCR data base. In addition, 256 individuals were deactivated in the system for different reasons including resettlement, voluntary, repatriations, and death. 191 individuals who turned five years old were biometrically enrolled in UNHCR's database. 247 new proof of registration documents were also re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition. 337 refugees IDs were also issued by the authorities.

## 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 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 12,534 refugee children (6,156 boys and 5,933 girls) are enrolled in primary, while 4,598 (2,484 boys and 2,136 girls) attend secondary.
- In addition, 1,559 children attend home based Early Childhood Development, and 4,607 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) from Mahama refugee camp are enrolled in universities across Rwanda. UNHCR supports university students to apply for scholarships through the Elite centre managed by Maison Shalom and the Ideas Box centre managed by Humanity and Inclusion where they access tablets, computers and connect to the internet to apply for tertiary education opportunities.
- All teachers are enrolled on the government payroll. In partnership with WFP and school management, children in early childhood development programs and primary school 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 lack of 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 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 since June 2021, food assistance is provided by WFP through a monthly cash grant to refugees on a targeted basis. Since February 2023, the cash assistance has been increased, whereby 83% of the population classified as highly vulnerable receive the full amount of 10,000 RWF (an increase from 7,000 RWF per month), while 8% who are classified as moderately vulnerable receive 5,000RWF (increased from 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 above the recommended minimum standard of 20 litres per person per day (daily average of clean water supplied to Mahama Camp: 1,356.6 m<sup>3</sup> and 159.6 m<sup>3</sup> 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. 1,209 m<sup>3</sup> of sludges from 142 blocks of latrine and 538 m<sup>3</sup> of garbage from 28 refuse pits garbage collection sites were collected and removed from the camp in February 2023.

- 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.
- 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 14,953 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 also now distributed liquid petroleum gas (LPG) to all refugees in Mahama camp to meet their energy needs.
- To support the productive use of energy in Mahama camp, Practical Action runs a Renewable Energy for Refugees programme. Phase II of the programme was launched in late 2022 and has so far identified entrepreneurs and 100 businesses mapped in Mahama 2 and the local host community who will benefit from solarization of their energy sources.
- As part of a Climate Resilient Farming project, Practical Action has also coached farmers (MACLFACO/Mahama Cereal and Legumes Farmers' Cooperative) in the host community on how to prepare compost manure.
- In February as part of environmental protection initiatives, Rwanda Red Cross planted 250 avocados in GS Paysanat and 1,000 caliantra in the camp while their volunteers were weeding 19,500 Eucalyptus planted on 15Ha in Host community.
- Refugee volunteers are also employed as part of an environment project operated by World Vision International to improve the environment of Mahama camp. The volunteers are responsible for watering and planting trees throughout the camp. In February, the cultivation of 760 seedlings occurred and 64 caliantra trees were planted.

### Livelihoods and Economic inclusion

- There are three markets in Mahama refugee camp, and refugees can also access a larger market located outside the camp with businesses run by both refugees and Rwandans. Many refugees operate small businesses at the markets providing income to support their families and increasing their self-reliance.
- Indigo Africa provides entrepreneurship trainings and mentorship to women artisans in Mahama camp. Many of the handicraft products are subsequently sold to local and international market such as through UNHCR's Made51 scheme.
- Refugees in Mahama camp are provided with opportunities for self-reliance and supported to engage in livelihood opportunities. In February, 985 refugees received loans (980 from saving groups and 5 from Umutanguha microfinance and village saving groups).

- UNHCR alongside livelihood partners provides refugees in Mahama with entrepreneurship trainings. In February, 100 individuals received financial literacy training by Umutanguha Microfinance and opened 84 new accounts. In addition, 547 refugees participated in trainings about saving groups which was run by World Vision International as part of the Poverty Alleviation Coalition project.
- From 20 – 23 February, UNHCR in partnership with partners in the livelihoods sector, facilitated refugees to participate in Kirehe District Open Day, where they showcased their products and earned money.

### Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,377 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from Mahama refugee camp. A convoy of 32 families of 67 Burundian refugees were facilitated to return to Burundi from Mahama camp on 8<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023. 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.
- During the month of February, 12 cases of 45 refugees were identified for resettlement, while 23 cases were submitted for resettlement consideration to Norway and USA. In addition, 170 refugees departed from Mahama to resettlement countries during the month including 75 to the USA, 40 to Canada, 26 to Denmark, 25 to France, and 2 to Norway.
- A mission from Refugee Support Centre Africa (RSC) commenced resettlement case pre-screening interviews on the 27 January. RSC Africa is responsible for supporting the resettlement of refugees to the USA. The current mission will target interviewing 738 refugees from Mahama until the 06 of March when the mission will end.
- In Mahama, UNHCR's resettlement unit are also continuing to work on residual resettlement cases. 1,645 cases which have been created since 2017 are at various stages of the resettlement process pending finalization and departures. UNHCR is hoping to finalize the cases and provide an update to the refugee families involved during the first quarter of 2023.

### CONTACTS

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