

# Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

March 2023

**55,116 refugees live** in Mahama refugee camp located in Kirehe District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

The camp was established in **2015** when **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.

Mahama camp is also currently hosting **1,775 new asylum seekers from DRC** who arrived in the end of 2022.

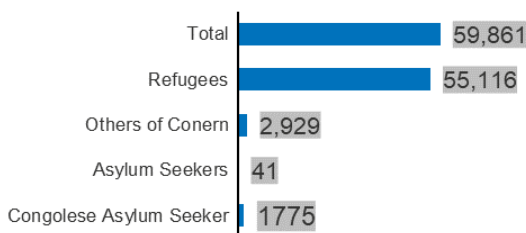


Celebrations of International Women Day under the theme, "DigitAll: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality. Women display their IT skills, 08 March 2023.



Celebrations of World Water Day, 22 March 2023

## POPULATION OF CONCERN



Source: © UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency

**42 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 in charge 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 daily. On 09 March, UNHCR hosted the monthly coordination meeting with all implementing partners co-chaired by MINEMA.
- 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. During the month of March, UNHCR with partners held 10 village meetings to communicate with the population on different aspects and provide accurate information accordingly.
- 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. Between 28 - 29 March, the United Nations Country Team including the Resident Coordinator and MINEMA Minister visited Kirehe district and Mahama refugee camp. The objective of the mission was to strengthen the collaboration with the local authorities and observe the achievements and challenges amid the refugee response.
- 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. On 14 March a protection coordination meeting was held chaired by UNHCR and co-chaired by MINEMA with all the protection partners.
- For child protection, best interest assessments (BIAs) and best interest determination (BIDs) reports are regularly conducted by UNHCR and partners to determine the best course of action in sensitive child protection cases. In addition, the Rwandan Red Cross supports with family tracing and reunification activities. Government officials are part of the BID Panel and case management conference to find durable solutions to complicated cases on monthly basis. In March a BID panel took place on 16/03/2023 where 5 BIDs were discussed and recommendations made. 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. To ensure regular monitoring and follow, UNHCR organised and conducted the CP/GBV monthly coordination meeting on 14 March to identify gaps within activity implementation and provide support plus advocacy.
- 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. In line with the communication with the communities approach, UNHCR, MINEMA, PFR and other protection partners conducted 07 community awareness campaigns to sensitize the community on different issues including prevention of crime, camp rules and regulations, CP/GBV, registration and documentation and others in March.
- 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. Through different awareness raising campaigns 2,795 persons we serve were reached with CP/GBV prevention and response messages.

### 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 March, 302 individuals were deactivated in the system for different reasons including resettlement, voluntary, repatriations, and death while 14 were reactivated after being cleared by the CRP. 170 individuals were registered especially new-born babies while 96 individuals who turned five years old were biometrically enrolled in UNHCR's database. 384 new proof of registration documents were also re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition. While 623 refugee 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, Impact Hope, Agahozo shalom, EduFamme and family sponsored students
- 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 working at refugee hosting school 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. At the beginning of 2023, there was an agreement to hand over the school feeding program to be implemented fully by the School Administration rather than UNHCR providing energy for cooking. Discussions are ongoing on how best to support the school administration once supply of LPG is terminated by UNHCR to the schools. Currently UNHCR is constructing cooking stoves at the school kitchens in support of the rollout process. On 30 March, the site handover for the construction of 10 briquettes burning stoves was conducted.
- UNHCR also supports connected learning through the Profuturo platform for upper primary students from level four to six and helps build teachers' teaching capacity in ICT. On 29 March the UNCT team, MINEMA Minister and other government officials visited Paysannat L schools to learn more about the integration of refugees within national schools. During the visit, they met students and Teachers in the ICT Lab (Profuturo platform), visited some classrooms and the Girls' Safe Room.
- Due to lack of facilities, no science combinations are currently offered at the schools near Mahama camp. 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.
- New asylum seekers from DRC who arrived in late 2022/early 2023, and who are currently being hosted at the departure centre in Mahama camp, are currently not enrolled in school due to lack of documentation. UNHCR continues advocacy with the Government of Rwanda to change this situation.

## Health and Nutrition

- Refugees have access to primary health care services from two health centres in Mahama camp. On average, **10,623** 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.
- Mahama II health centre was recognized as a medicalized health centre by the Rwandan Ministry of Health in March 2023. This means that pregnant women with complications will have access to Emergency Obstetric Care at the health centre in the camp rather than having to be referred to hospitals in the coming months. 99% of deliveries are currently 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. Measles vaccination coverage also stands at 96% with 19,423 children having received their vaccinations.

- 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, 121 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 83,1% of the population classified as highly vulnerable receive the full amount of 10,000 RWF (an increase from 7,000 RWF per month), while 7,4% 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. Multipurpose cash assistance for refugees in Q1 2023 was delivered to the population in Mahama in March.
- For the new asylum seekers from DRC who are currently being accommodated in Mahama camp, however, cash assistance is currently not an option. As a result, UNHCR and partners are working to provide this population with in-kind assistance. Non-food items such as mattresses and solar lighting have been distributed to the population. The asylum seekers also receive porridge for breakfast and two hot meals a day from WFP and ADRA.

### 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 23.5 litres per person per day which is above the recommended minimum standard of 20 litres per person per day.
- 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. 844 m3 of sludges from 98 blocks of latrine and 336 m3 of garbage from 77 refuse pits garbage collection sites were collected and removed from the camp in March 2023.
- The replacement of the old/damaged/vandalized water taps has officially started in Mahama camp by AYATEKE (water supply contractor) and so far, 134 taps were installed in 08 Villages across the camp.
- In Mahama camp hygiene promotion sessions are regularly conducted throughout the camp by a group of 127 refugee hygiene promoters. Through these activities the Community Based

Environmental and Hygiene Promotion Program (CBEHPP) is implemented and refugee communities are encouraged to adopt more hygienic practices.

- World Water Day celebrations took place on 22 March in Mahama Camp. As part of a week of celebrations, sessions emphasizing the proper use of water, sanitation, good hygiene practices and safeguarding of WASH facilities to curb vandalism issues were conducted by UNHCR and partners in Mahama Camp.

### Shelter and NFIs

- 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 March, 44 shelters in needs of urgent re-habitation were jointly assessed with UNHCR, MINEMA and the Refugee Committee.
- In Mahama camp, UNHCR is currently constructing 28 classrooms with 30% of the construction work currently completed.
- 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. This month, the shelter assessment was conducted to identify the shelters in needs of urgent repairs.
- In support of cash-based interventions and the distribution of multi-purpose cash assistance to help refugees purchase non-food items (NFIs), UNHCR conducted a bank registration exercise for refugees in Mahama camp between 13- 15 March. A total of 303 refugee households were supported during these three days to complete their bank registration. In addition, around 2,000 dormant accounts of refugees which were inactive were reactivated during the exercise, so that beneficiaries are now able to use their account and make the necessary withdrawals.

### 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 distributes liquid petroleum gas (LPG) to all refugees in Mahama camp to meet their energy needs. In March, 14,811 LPG cylinders equivalent to 88,866 kilograms were refilled and distributed to refugees in Mahama camp. UNHCR is also exploring the use of biometrics for LPG distribution. A training was conducted on the mechanisms required in March for further roll-out in the future.
- 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 in Mahama 2 and the local host community who will benefit from solarization of their energy sources.
- To reduce the UNHCR's dependency on fuel and diesel generators to supply electricity, UNHCR and MINEMA are working with partners to connect all facilities in Mahama refugee camp to the national electricity grid. As of May 2023, UNHCR will only provide fuel as a backup.
- As part of a Climate Resilient Farming project, Practical Action has coached farmers (MACLFACO/Mahama Cereal and Legumes Farmers' Cooperative) in the host community on how to prepare compost manure.

- Refugee volunteers also support, as part of an environment project operated by World Vision International, in improving the environment of Mahama camp and are responsible for watering and planting trees throughout the camp.

### Livelihoods and Economic inclusion

- There are three markets in Mahama refugee camp, and refugees can also access a larger market located outside the camp. 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. The women artisans' sales for March include 2,351,000 Rwf from Made51 orders. The cooperatives also sold the commodities during UNCT visit equalling to 450,000Rwf.
- Increasing the self-reliance of refugees in Mahama camp is one of the main priorities of UNHCR. In 2022, through funding from Denmark, UNHCR in partnership with Caritas provided entrepreneurship trainings and a cash grant of \$800 to start a business to 235 refugees and members of the local Rwandan host community in Mahama refugee camp. While support to the first cohort continues, in 2023 UNHCR and Caritas have identified an additional 721 individuals for the second phase of the project, including 505 refugees and 216 nationals.
- UNHCR alongside livelihood partners provides refugees in Mahama with entrepreneurship and business skills trainings. In March, 100 individuals received financial literacy training by Umutanguha Microfinance and opened 110 new accounts. In addition, 59 community-based volunteers were trained on SILC methodology and financial literacy by Caritas Rwanda and 50 women with small businesses (39 refugees and 11 Rwandans) were trained on business planning by the Rwandan Red Cross. In March, 1,006 refugees also received loans from various entities, including 991 from saving groups and 15 from Umutanguha microfinance and village saving groups.



*Member of the UN Country Team and Heads of UN Agencies in Rwanda visit the Women's Centre in Mahama Refugee Camp and engage with female entrepreneurs and cooperatives selling handmade artisanal products.*

### Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,377 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from Mahama refugee camp. On 29 March 2023, UNHCR supported an additional convoy of 31 families of 49 Burundian refugees to return to Burundi from Mahama camp. 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 March, 175 refugees were identified for resettlement, while 119 refugees were submitted for resettlement consideration to USA. In addition, 256 refugees departed from Mahama to resettlement countries including USA, Canada, and Norway during the month.
- A mission from Refugee Support Centre Africa (RSC) concluded their resettlement case pre-screening interviews on 10<sup>th</sup> March. RSC Africa is responsible for supporting the resettlement of refugees to the USA. The mission interviewed 738 refugees from Mahama.
- A mission from Canada conducted resettlement interviews from 20<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> March in Kigali. The mission interviewed 117 refugees from Mahama.
- A mission from Norway conducted resettlement interviews from 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March in Kigali. The mission interviewed 36 individuals from Mahama.

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