

Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

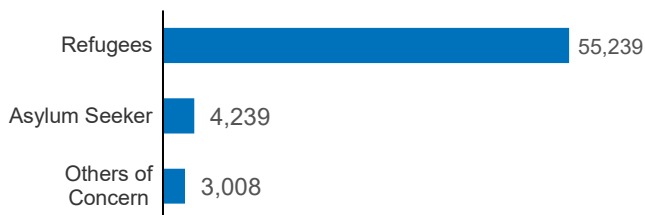
September 2023

62,486 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.

About **51 per cent** of the camp's population is younger than 18 years old.

POPULATION OF CONCERN



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



Visit to Mahama camp by the Minister in charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) and UNHCR Rwanda's Assistant Representative for Protection on 8 September 2023.

CONTACTS

Farhat Jabeen Khan Head of Sub Office, Kirehe,
jabeen@unhcr.org, Cell +250 788 382280

Main Activities

Camp Coordination and Camp Management

- Mahama refugee camp is managed by the Ministry of Emergency Management (MINEMA) represented by Camp Manager, Deputy Camp Manager and supported by the Directorate General of Immigration and Emigration (DGIE) staff and Rwanda National Police (RNP). Camp coordination is undertaken by MINEMA and UNHCR through coordination meetings and multi-functional monitoring conducted on a quarterly basis.
- Mahama camp is divided into two sites, Mahama I and II, and 18 villages. A refugee leadership structure is in place comprising of 8 refugee executive committee members, 9 quartier leaders and 18 village leaders who provide a voice for refugee community.
- UNHCR works with seven implementing partners in Mahama camp: MINEMA for camp management; Save the Children International (SCI) for health, nutrition, sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection; Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for logistics; Caritas Rwanda for livelihoods; Prison Fellowship Rwanda (PFR) for community-based protection and legal support; World Vision International (WVI) for education, water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as environment; Humanity & Inclusion (HI) for persons with specific needs (PSN).
- In addition, operational partners, including Inkomoko, Alight, Maison Shalom, Red Cross Rwanda, Pro-Femmes/ Twese Hamwe, Indego Africa, GIZ, Practical Action and Umutanguha Microfinance provide support to refugees in the camp 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, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in education, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for reproductive health, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for sanitation, transportation, and health screening for resettlement cases.

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 (GBV), community-based protection (CBP) and legal support. As the sector lead for protection, UNHCR holds coordination meetings in the camp on regular basis. On 28 September, the Protection Coordination meeting was held and co-chaired by UNHCR and MINEMA with all the protection partners.
- UNHCR operates two protection desks in Mahama refugee camp every weekday (Monday to Friday). This is to ensure the identification of vulnerable refugees and protection cases, provide counselling, and refer refugees to services to respond to their needs. Most refugees who approach the protection desks enquire about resettlement opportunities, health services, request changes to their family composition (registering of births, deaths, and marriages), and report protection concerns. In September, UNHCR received 23 refugee cases at the protection desks, each of which received counselling and were followed up on an individual basis.
- To ensure accountability to the refugee community, UNHCR and partners also operate a range of complaint and feedback mechanisms including protection hotline, protection email, and the protection desks in Mahama refugee camp. In September, 14 cases were received on the hotline, they were related to health, protection, shelter, and targeted assistance. UNHCR and its partners followed-up on these cases. Through the protection desk and hotline, UNHCR also follows up on appeals related to targeted assistance and checks whether refugee households have been categorised appropriately as per the established criteria for the delivery of food assistance.

- In Mahama refugee camp, community-based child protection mechanisms are utilized to strengthen child protection throughout the camp. UNHCR staff and partners work to manage individual child protection cases providing counselling and solutions to the issues that they face. UNHCR and partners working in the protection sector have established a child protection safety network, which includes alternative care, child protection and GBV procedures and a case management system, which ensures all protection activities are well coordinated. The child protection team also works in close collaboration with the district government, the National Commission for Children (NCC), MINEMA and DGIE. Government officials are part of the best interest procedures (BIP) process, including on the Best Interest Determination (BID) Panel and Case management conference, to find durable solutions to complicated cases on monthly basis.
- For child protection, best interest assessments (BIAs) and BIDs reports are conducted in collaboration with the International Committee of the 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. During the month, 71 BIAs and 2 BIDs for resettlement consideration were conducted.
- In Mahama refugee camp, a birth registration system is in place and is operated through PFR to ensure that newborn babies are registered with the district authorities and children grow up protected and able to enjoy their rights to essential services, including health and education.
- In September, 199 refugees (99 children and 100 parents) graduated from SCI's a Child and Youth Resilience Program, a series of workshops on topics such as self-esteem and peaceful interaction which was targeting girls and boys aged 14-20 and their parents or caregivers.
- To enhance community-based protection, 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. As part of communication with the communities, UNHCR, MINEMA, PFR and other protection partners regularly conduct community awareness campaigns to sensitize the community on different issues, including prevention of crime, camp rules and regulations, child protection/GBV, registration and documentation.
- 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, for example, 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, basketball, and volleyball. During this month, 6,533 children and adolescents (2,783 girls and 3,750 boys) participated in targeted programs such as sports for protection, while 2,992 children (1,186 girls and 1,806 boys) accessed child-friendly spaces.
- In Mahama refugee camp, UNHCR maintains accurate data of refugees living in the camp through regular registration of individuals and groups. This is achieved 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. UNHCR also carries out biometric enrolment 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 September 2023, 91 individuals were deactivated in UNHCR's proGres database for several reasons including resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and death, while 11 were reactivated after being cleared by the continuous registration panel (CRP). 75 new-born babies were registered while individuals who turned 5 years old were biometrically enrolled in the UNHCR's database. 234 new proof of registration documents were re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition.

- During this reporting period, there was Refugee ID Biometrics and Nationality Assessment exercise where: 1,370 individuals were biometrically enrolled; the nationality assessment was conducted for 243 individuals; 84 Refugee IDs for correction were recorded; 421 expired Refugee IDs were recorded; 101 lost Refugees IDs were recorded; 51 Rwandan IDs cards were handed to DGIE.
- In September, UNHCR registered 1,041 asylum seekers from DRC some of whom were recently relocated to Mahama Camp and others who have been accommodated in Mahama since the start of the influx in November 2022.

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 considerable 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 school operates a double shift system for primary level where some students attend in the morning and others in the afternoon.
- UNHCR supported enrolment of refugees and asylum seekers in the Paysannat L and monitored learning and school program for the new academic year.
- Following the exam results released in September, UNHCR and its partner WVI worked with schools to identify the refugee secondary students whose results meant they are eligible to attend schools of excellence. UNHCR also worked with school administration and WVI to select the best performers to be provided with scholarships to high secondary in school of excellences by Agahozo-Shalom Youth Village. Ten best students were selected, and the scholarship will be provided by Impact Hope.
- UNHCR and WVI shared information on new tertiary scholarship opportunities to secondary graduates' networks and helped 48 students to apply for such opportunities throughout the month through Paysannat L ICT room, the Ideas Box centre managed by Humanity & Inclusion and community library centre.
- All teachers at Paysannat L school are enrolled on the government payroll. Children in ECD programs and primary school are also provided with hot meals at Paysannat L school through the national system. Support for school feeding programmes was fully transferred to the Government of Rwanda in June 2023 whereby WFP directly supports the Government to subsidize 90 percent of the cost of refugee school meals. UNHCR has also constructed cooking stoves at the school kitchens to support this process.
- 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. Connected learning classrooms have been constructed and are operational at the school near Mahama through this programme.
- Due to lack of facilities, no science combinations are currently being offered at the schools near the camps. In addition, the ECD centre comprising of 10 classrooms is not operational due to lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities. To address the challenge of inadequate classrooms, UNHCR has completed construction of 8 classrooms and construction of 28 more classrooms in Mahama camp is ongoing, with 59 per cent of the construction completed as of September.

Health and Nutrition

- Refugees have access to primary health care services from two health centres in Mahama camp. Where additional treatment is needed, UNHCR facilitates and covers the costs of referrals to secondary and tertiary health care outside the camp. In September, 9,384 primary health care

consultations took place in the camp, including 279 patients referred to secondary and tertiary health care levels. This also included the delivery of 148 new-born babies during the month.

- Mahama II health centre was also inaugurated as a medicalized health centre in May 2023 and can conduct minor surgeries such as caesareans. Pregnant women with complications have access to emergency obstetric care within Mahama II health centre. 99 per cent of deliveries are addressed by skilled health workers. 30 C-section births were conducted in Mahama II health centre while five were transferred to Kirehe district hospital (secondary referral).
- Primary health care services provided in Mahama camp health centres in cooperation with SCI include outpatient consultations, immunization for children under 5 years old and pregnant women, reproductive healthcare, 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 of basic and laboratory investigations.
- Nutrition services include routine screening and management of malnutrition through supplementary feeding programs for children under 5 years old, pregnant, and lactating mothers, and those living with HIV, are provided by UNHCR and health partners.
- From 1 to 14 of September, UNHCR and SCI joined the Ministry of Health and the authorities of the Eastern Province to conduct an HIV/AIDS campaign “Let’s join efforts to break the chain of HIV”. The motivation for this campaign was related to the high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the country, especially in the Eastern Province, where SCI is operating. SCI raised awareness among over 36,000 people on HIV prevention and tested 1,566 people for HIV.
- From 11 to 15 of September, SCI in collaboration with the Ministry of Health through the Kirehe District authorities and the District’s hospital conducted a 2nd Round Poliomyelitis mass vaccination for all children of 0 to 7 years old and 6,809 children were vaccinated as a result.
- From 12 to 13 of September, community health workers participated in indoor residual spraying (IRS) activities which were conducted by Abt Associates where 3,600 structures/shelters (99.3 per cent of all structures/shelters in Mahama refugee camp) were sprayed/fumigated.
- 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.
- UNHCR and partners provide regular nutrition support and assistance to refugees in Rwanda. Currently, 14 severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 63 moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) cases are being assisted as part of the nutrition programme in Mahama refugee camp.

Food Security

- 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 84 per cent of the population classified as highly vulnerable receive the full amount of RWF 10,000 (an increase from RWF 7,000 per month), while 7.1 per cent who are classified as moderately vulnerable receive RWF 5,000 (increased from RWF 3,500).
- Through the support of WFP, Congolese asylum seekers hosted at the departure centre in Mahama who are pending formal registration, receive hot meals twice per day in lieu of having bank accounts where they can receive cash assistance. In addition, vulnerable refugees including children under 5 years, expectant and breastfeeding mothers, the elderly, and those with several chronic illnesses are provided with supplementary feeding.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

- Water for Mahama refugee camp is provided from the nearby Akagera River, treated at the permanent water treatment plant in the camp operated by Ayateke and distributed to the refugees through several water collection points.
- The average water supplied on daily basis to Mahama refugee camp was 1,272.1 m³ resulting in 22 litres per person per day for refugees, the average of 132.2 m³ was also supplied daily to the host community. In September, UNHCR carried out operational and maintenance of the water treatment plant and the water supply system in the camp alongside partners.
- 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).
- Hygiene promotion activities are conducted through community hygiene clubs and the Community Based Environmental and Hygiene Promotion Program model which empowers the community to adopt good practices. In September, UNHCR in partnership with WVI distributed 421 litres of liquid soap to public places including markets, camp entrances, gas distribution site, registration centre and departure centre.

Shelter and Non-Food items (NFIs)

- Mahama refugee camp covers 160 hectares 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 September, 24 shelters were rehabilitated with new roof, doors, and windows.
- Due to continued influx of new arrivals from DRC to Rwanda, UNHCR continues to conduct shelter mapping exercises to identify vacant shelters which can accommodate the additional asylum seekers. In September, UNHCR allocated shelters to 1,082 asylum seekers from DRC in Mahama refugee camp.
- On a quarterly basis, UNHCR provides a cash grant for refugees who have a bank account to cover the cost of NFIs 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 kind of items are targeted for the quarter. Due to the lack of funds, the distribution of cash assistance for NFIs is now on pause.
- The distribution of NFIs in-kind and food in-kind for refugees and asylum seekers transferred from urban areas to Mahama camp as well as to newly arrived Congolese asylum seekers from other camps continued in September. As a result, 568 households of 1,636 Congolese asylum seekers received food in-kind for one month.
- In September, UNHCR distributed kitchen sets to 358 households of 865 individuals. Blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans and cooking pots were also distributed to Congolese asylum seekers and refugees transferred from urban areas to help them settle into their new environment.

Energy and 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. The implementation of gas-powered stoves is estimated to reduce household air pollution by 90 per cent. UNHCR consequently distributes 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 in Mahama II and the local host community

who will benefit from solarization of their energy sources. In addition, as part of the productive use of energy scheme, Practical Action has constructed footings to install 531 standalone solar streetlights in the camp.

- Refugee volunteers also support, as part of an environment project operated by WVI, in improving the environment of Mahama camp. They are responsible for watering and planting trees throughout the camp.
- In September, in partnership with WVI, an average of 16,128 people were reached during the environmental protection promotion activities through community work and household visits. Moreover, refugee casual workers, in collaboration with WVI, planted 67 bamboos in the camp, conducted semi-direct seeding activity for 2,663 trees in the nursery, sprayed 9,678 trees with insecticide, and filled 5,059 plastic growing bags with manure to sow different species of trees for future trees plantation.

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.
- Indego Africa provides entrepreneurship trainings and mentorship to women artisans in Mahama camp. Many of the handcraft products are subsequently sold to local and international markets such as UNHCR's Made51 scheme. In September, three women's artisans cooperatives received orders of handmaid products from Indego, and their orders were exported to international market, thus earning income from their sales.
- In Mahama refugee camp, UNHCR runs a livelihood project in partnership with Caritas Rwanda to support refugees and Rwandan host communities graduate from poverty. In September, 108 households under the graduation project received cash grants totalling RWF 1,362,000 to support them in establishing small businesses, while 721 new businesses received the second instalment of their grant.
- In September, 794 refugees and Rwandans received loans (678 from saving groups, 23 from Umutanguha and 93 from Inkomoko) to support their businesses. Inkomoko also conducted business consultation to 1,606 business owners (417 refugees and 417 host community). In addition, Inkomoko trained 1,805 business owners on business management, including 324 in doing business in Rwanda, 362 in market stakeholder mapping, 372 in procurement, tendering and bidding training, 381 in investment readiness and 366 in taxation.
- Twenty-five youth were sent to Kigali to participate in a six-month vocational training on the usage of heavy machinery. The cost of their training will be paid by Maison Shalom.

Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,382 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from Mahama refugee camp. In September, no voluntary repatriations were facilitated.
- In September, UNHCR submitted 71 cases consisting of 274 refugees for resettlement to the USA, and other resettlement countries including Norway and Canada. In total, 222 refugees departed to resettlement countries during the month, with 183 to the USA, 17 to Norway, and 22 to Canada.