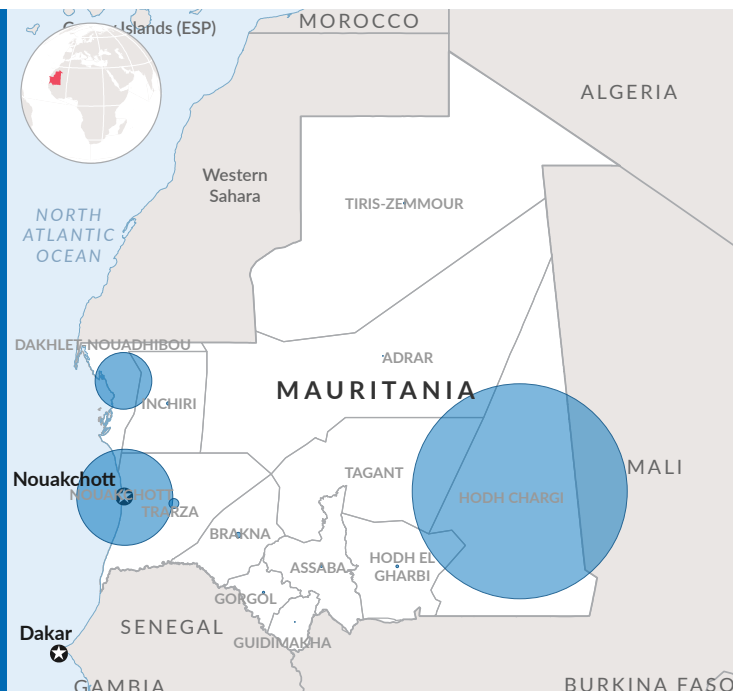


ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF MAURITANIA

As of June 2023, there are 85,680 Malian refugees living in Mbera camp and 7,046 living in and around Nema city. In addition, 15,498 refugees and asylum-seekers of different nationalities are registered in urban centres, along with 2,700 Malians awaiting registration. Mauritania has been welcoming refugees over several decades, particularly Malian refugees fleeing since 2012, as a result of the ongoing conflict and violence in the northern and central regions of their country.



Over 98 per cent of refugees in Mauritania are from Mali, most living in the arid south-eastern moughataa (district) of Bassikounou in the Hodh Chargui region. They are predominantly located in Mbera refugee camp and the surrounding villages and rural areas, alongside host communities, near the border with Mali. Other refugees in Mauritania come from the Central African Republic, Senegal and the Syrian Arab Republic. Urban refugees and asylum-seekers comprise around 14 per cent of the total population and live in rented apartments, or precarious housing, in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

KEY POPULATION DATA (as of 30 June 2023)

103,455

Refugees

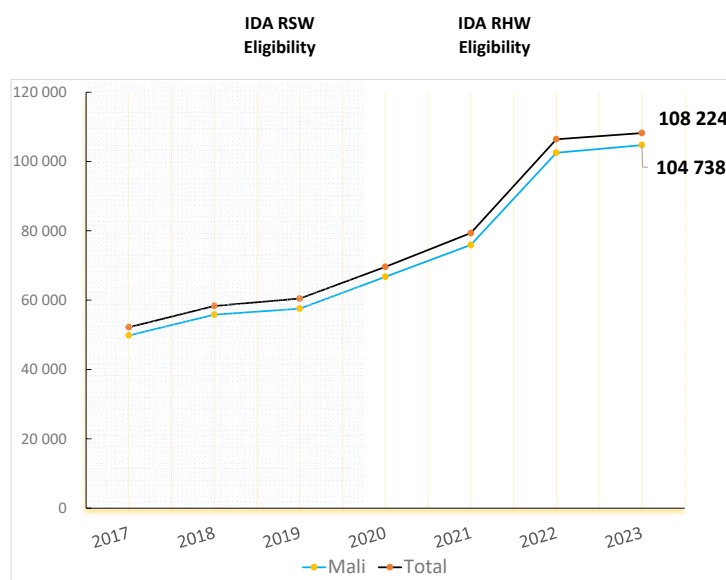
4,769

Asylum-seekers

2,36%

of the country's population (4,583,907) are refugees and asylum-seekers.

IDA 18 RSW/IDA 19 WHR
Eligibility: September 2017



POLICY DIMENSIONS

(as of 30 June 2023)

1. Host Communities

1.1 Support for communities in refugee-hosting areas

There has been little change since June 2020 in this domain and no specific national fiscal or budget policy is yet in place to provide additional financial transfers to areas most affected by the presence of refugees. The two channels for financial transfers from the national level to regional councils, for investment and operating expenditure, respectively, remain those set out in the [Decree 089 of 2019](#) of the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization (MIDEC), which is applicable country-wide. Municipalities continue to receive support through the Regional Development Fund (*Fonds Régional de Développement*), as set out in [Circular 0001](#) of the MIDEC in 2016. The same formula based on population size and the poverty rate continues to apply to determine the allocations to regions and municipalities, without taking into account data on refugee population numbers and poverty levels.

While the contribution of Mauritania through its national budget for refugee issues is limited, it remains a critical support towards refugee inclusion. In 2023, this has included steady security costs to ensure the safety of refugees in Mbera camp as well as government support to the health facilities in the camp (core human resources and yearly dotation) and the operating budget for the National Consultative Commission for Refugees (*Commission nationale consultative pour les réfugiés et les Personnes à Protéger*, CNCRPP).

Additionally, in 2021, the Government of Mauritania created a commission in charge of coordinating development projects targeting refugees (*Commission de coordination des projets de développement ciblant les réfugiés*, [Decree 436/MIDEC of 2021](#)) and, in 2022, an administrative unit in charge of coordinating and monitoring development programs in Hodh Chargui (*Cellule de Coordination et de Suivi des Projets et Programmes de Développement du Hodh Chargui*, [Decree 166/MAEPSP of 2022](#)). Although the commission and the coordination unit's primary objective is to coordinate and measure the effectiveness of refugee and host community programs implemented in refugee-hosting areas, not to foster additional public investment, their creation demonstrates the specific attention of the Mauritanian Government to these geographic areas. The attention paid to the Hodh Chargui region was illustrated by a) the organization of a [roundtable](#) for Hodh Chargui in November 2021, b) the elaboration of a [regional development plan](#) (*Stratégie Régionale de Croissance Accélérée et de Prospérité Partagée 2021-2025, SCRAPP*) and c) the conversion in 2023 of the Bassikounou health center into a district hospital. The establishment of the hospital, which is an exception at the district level in Mauritania, is expected to mobilize additional resources from the Ministry of Health to the benefit of the refugee and host communities.

1.2 Social cohesion

While the relations between refugee and host communities and within the refugee communities themselves remain positive overall, the Government's 2018 Policy Development Letter included policies aimed at identifying, preventing and mitigating social tensions in refugee-hosting areas between host communities and refugees arising from unequal access to social services and competition for shared natural resources in a fragile environment. The letter set out planned interventions for 2019-2022 to address these risks, including strengthening local governance with support for local peace committees, increasing social protection and investing in social services that benefit both refugees and host communities.

The regional and local authorities have continuously engaged with both refugee and host communities and with UNHCR to ensure peaceful coexistence through regular exchange visits and support to community joint initiatives (such as the [fire brigade](#)). However, the Government policy still does not provide for local mechanisms to promote peaceful coexistence, dialogue, joint activities and citizen engagement among

refugees and host communities. Meanwhile 132 local peace committees have been created in Mbera camp and villages in the Hodh Charrua region by UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). A UNHCR-Save the Children [study](#) from January 2020 confirmed that these committees – despite limitations linked to their lack of training and resources – play an active role in reducing tensions and managing access to resources shared by refugees and host communities. While there are no formal dispute resolution mechanisms in urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou), informal intra-communal traditional mechanisms are active.

In practice, most refugees feel integrated into the Mauritanian society (in 2021, more than 90 per cent of refugees of Mbera camp indicated they felt integrated, [UNHCR/GIZ, 2023](#)). If interactions with the host communities are frequent for 67 per cent of the refugees living within the host communities in Hodh Chargui, they remain rarer in Mbera camp (in 2021, 70 per cent of households had no interactions with the host communities).

At national level, the anti-discrimination legal and policy framework formally protects refugees. The [Decree 063/2022](#) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Cooperation and of Mauritians Abroad stipulates equal access to health services, employment, social security and education for refugees. The 2018 anti-discrimination law (No 2018-023) prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race or language, and continues to be interpreted as applying also to refugees. Nonetheless, UN human rights experts have expressed concerns regarding the unclear definition of discrimination and the inconsistencies with international human rights instruments, such as the failure to expressly include nationality and disabilities among prohibited grounds for discrimination and to specify that penalties will be proportional to the severity of the violation ([OHCHR report](#)).

In practice, discrimination still occurs in some situations affecting both refugees and host communities, notably linked to sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC), disability or ethnicity. Isolated cases have been reported by foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers, where they faced additional barriers to access services and the job market as a result of their migratory or protection status.

1.3 Environmental management

In the absence of national environmental policies specific to refugee-hosting areas, the national policies apply to these areas and are used to also mitigate additional environmental impact of hosting refugees. The National Strategy for Environment and Sustainable Development ([Stratégie Nationale de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable, SNDD](#)) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Access to Water and Sanitation ([Stratégie Nationale pour un Accès Durable à l'Eau et à l'Assainissement, SNADEA](#)) remain in force aiming at halting deforestation by 2030, planting trees, preventing desertification, ensuring universal access to potable water, and reducing exposure to climate shocks. Furthermore, Mbera refugee camp is located on the original path of the Great Green Wall (GGW) and close to the updated GGW path. The GGW also passes through several districts of Hodh Chargui region where thousands of refugees live among host communities. Intended to restore the degraded landscapes of the African continent and to transform millions of lives in the Sahel, this initiative is piloted in Mauritania by the [National Agency of the GGW](#) (Ministry of Environment).

In practice, investment in these priorities continues to be limited to interventions by UNHCR and other humanitarian actors. However, under the two Government-led projects on sanitation and [urbanization](#) in Hodh Chargui for refugee and host communities, environmental investments for Mbera camp and surrounding areas are currently under way to improve sanitation and waste management.

1.4 Preparedness for refugee inflows

While the MIDEC elaborated a National Contingency Plan in December 2021 with the support of IOM, there is no national preparedness framework to respond to increased or new refugee inflows in ways that

minimize short- and medium-term socioeconomic impacts on hosting regions. The Government, UNHCR and humanitarian partners have been annually updating the contingency plan for refugee inflows to the *moughataa* (district) of Bassikounou, though this process is not linked to a national policy basis nor integrated into national institutional structures.

2. Regulatory Environment and Governance

2.1 Normative framework

As a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, Mauritania has not yet passed a national asylum law despite the pledge made to this effect at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF). These instruments are implemented at the national level through [Decree 022/2005](#), which was amended and replaced by [Decree 063/2022](#), in conjunction with the national policy framework. The national Consultative Commission on Refugees (CNCR) was renamed as the Consultative Commission on Refugees and Persons to Protect (*Commission Nationale Consultative sur les Réfugiés et les Personnes à Protéger*, CNCRPP). Under the new decree, the refugee definition remains unchanged, but a new category of “persons to protect” was created for individuals who do not meet the criteria to be recognized as refugees under the 1951 Convention, but who are at risk of torture or inhumane treatment in their country of origin. The revised decree also includes new provisions for the issuance of convention travel documents for refugees and travel documents for persons to protect.

In the absence of a fully-fledged national asylum system, refugee status determination (RSD) continues to be carried out solely by UNHCR under its mandate. In Mbera camp, Malian refugees (from North and central Mali) are being granted refugee status through a prima facie approach while in the urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou), Malians from the same region are processed under merged Registration/RSD procedures. For Malians originating from other parts of the country and asylum-seekers from other countries of origin or habitual residence, individual regular RSD procedures are conducted.

In February 2022, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, to formalize UNHCR’s temporary role in RSD and confirm its decisions recognising individual international protection needs pending the adoption of a national asylum system. The MoU further enhances protection from arrest, detention and *refoulement*, extends the issuance of national refugee IDs to refugees in urban areas and gives access to the labour market, banking and connectivity to urban refugees who did not have access to documentation before the signature of the MoU.

UNHCR continues to advocate for the development and implementation of a comprehensive asylum law that would allow the Government to assume full responsibility for refugee protection.

Key authorities at the central level are informed of applicable international laws and policies thanks to regular training conducted by the MIDEDEC and UNHCR on refugee rights and obligations and the responsibilities of the authorities. However, gaps in awareness at local level are still observed, including among border officials.

2.2 Security of legal status

The [Decree 0782/MIDEDEC of 2018](#) provided for the issuance (by the government) of refugee identification cards to Malian refugees in Mbera camp with a two-year (renewable) validity. These cards serve as residency permits. In addition to this Decree, the [Decree 1128/MIDEDEC of 2020](#) extended the card issuance to all refugees in Mauritania. Nonetheless, the authorities indicated in early 2021 that the issuance of refugee cards for out-of-camp refugees could not take place until there was a formal agreement recognizing UNHCR’s role in conducting RSD and UNHCR’s RSD decisions. This delayed the issuance of refugee identification cards in urban areas by the Government until the signature of the 2022 MoU between UNHCR and the Ministry of

Interior and Decentralization. Despite the signing of the MoU, the issuance of refugee cards has been further delayed due to administrative barriers, legal requirements, and limited capacity of the National Agency of Populations and Secured Titles (*Agence Nationale du Registre des populations et des Titres Sécurisés*, ANRPTS). The 2022 MoU included clauses relating to the facilitation and acceleration of the issuance of identification cards for refugees in urban areas and acceptance by the authorities UNHCR's decisions.

The [Decree 063/2022](#) also details the criteria and procedures on refugee expulsion. In 2022 and 2023, there was no known or reported *refoulement* of registered refugees on the grounds of national security, public order or criminal convictions, nor cases of unlawful or lawful termination of refugee status. However, as a result of increased national security and border control aiming at monitoring both irregular and regular migration, an increasing number of refugees and asylum-seekers – including those registered with UNHCR – are reporting to UNHCR and its partners being arrested, searched, detained, denied immediate entry and being transported from urban areas to the borders with Mali and Senegal at risk of being expelled/refouled. Since the beginning of 2023, an increasing albeit very small number of 10 refugees and asylum-seekers have reportedly been taken to the borders despite presenting their asylum-seeker certificates and/or refugee cards. UNHCR and its legal partner are working together to assess and prevent potential violations of the *non-refoulement* principle. UNHCR conducts regular screening in detention centres for those arrested within the context of mixed movements; being able to screen and identify those in need of international protection is critical to prevent arbitrary detention and *refoulement*. Refugees and asylum-seekers also have access to legal aid, including legal representation, through UNHCR's partners within the justice system in both civil and criminal matters.

Cessation procedures continue to be implemented by UNHCR in line with its standards and procedures with no direct involvement from the Government.

In the first half of 2023, several interconnected security incidents and concerns – including the escape of four jihadist prisoners from the central prison in Nouakchott on 5 March, legislative and municipal elections in May, and unrest and widespread protests in late May/early June after the death in custody of a young black Mauritanian – have led the Mauritanian authorities to drastically increase the use of stop and search procedures and more rigorous police and military checks. These measures also affect refugees and asylum-seekers, both documented and undocumented, considering they are easily identified as foreigners from the outset and upon presentation of their documents. Within the last two months, UNHCR and its legal partner have received an increased number of refugees and asylum-seekers after being detained or questioned by the police. Around 100 refugees and asylum-seekers who, not having renewed their asylum-seeker certificates or refugee cards for an extended period of time, suddenly approached UNHCR to seek renewal, citing increased police checks and the fear of being arrested without valid documents. These are mostly individuals who were residing in remote areas where they had been working and who did not in the past feel threatened despite holding expired documents.

2.3 Institutional framework for refugee management and coordination

The newly renamed Consultative National Commission for Refugees and Persons to Protect (CCRPP) is the inter-ministerial body in charge of refugee management and coordination. UNHCR's senior management is invited to take part in the CNCRPP's regular meetings during which policies related to refugees are discussed. This body remains one of UNHCR's key entry points to the Mauritanian government/ administration on refugees and international protection-related issues. It is an equally important interlocutor to engage the Government on its international commitments, and on issues such as documentation, mixed movements, joint registration of Malian refugee in Mbera camp and statelessness prevention activities, to name a few.

The 2012 National Commission for Humanitarian Assistance, established to manage humanitarian assistance in cooperation with UNHCR, other partners and civil society organizations, has remained inactive. At the request of the Government, UNHCR has continued to coordinate the humanitarian response to the Malian refugee situation in close collaboration with the MIDEK and local authorities.

There has not been progress regarding the enactment of a national asylum law, which was one of the pledges

made by Mauritania at the 2019 GRF. The same can be said towards the creation of a national asylum system which still requires significant technical support and resources. In the interim, the [Decree 063/2022](#) makes the protection environment safer and ensures that those in need of international protection have access to asylum.

The 2021 Commission in charge of coordinating the development project targeting refugees and headed by the General Director of Territorial Administration, meets quarterly and coordinates inclusion of refugees in national services and development programs. The coordinator of each of the four Project Management Units (PMUs) of the World Bank-funded projects using the IDA-18 Refugee Sub-Window are members of the Commission.

Refugee inclusion in national services has also led to a stronger involvement of the sectoral ministries since 2020. Those in charge of health, education, employment, environment, social affairs, social protection and water and sanitation are very active in this regard, including in Mbera camp. This stronger involvement translated into the [second action plan](#) (2021-2025) of the [Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity \(SCAPP\) 2016-2030](#), which features refugee inclusion as a prominent objective for Mauritania. The ongoing approval by the authorities of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), to which UNHCR is an important stakeholder, also reflects the support for refugee inclusion.

While refugees are not mentioned in the [Ten-year National Strategy for the Development of Statistics 2021-2030](#) (*Stratégie Nationale Décennale pour le Développement de la Statistique, SNDDS*), the National Agency for Statistics and Demographic and the Economic Analysis Office of Statistics of Mauritania (*Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Démographique et Economique, ANSADE*) agreed in 2022 to include refugees in upcoming national surveys. In practice, refugees have not been included in the [2019-2021 Demographic and Health Survey](#) for Mauritania, but have been included in the [2021 SMART nutrition survey](#), undertaken by Mauritania's Ministry of Health with UNICEF and the support from the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission (ECHO), the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ).

No formal consultation mechanisms to obtain refugees' input and feedback on government decisions have been established to date by national institutions.

2.4 Access to civil registration and documentation

Progress in terms of civil registration and documentation coverage has been observed. However, delays are a major constraint as a result of administrative barriers, legal requirements, and limited capacity of ANRPTS, particularly as a result of the Agency having dedicated its capacities to the foreigner's enrolment campaign organized at the end of 2022.

Upon registration with UNHCR, refugees are enrolled with the ANRPTS under a formal agreement with UNHCR. Each registered refugee receives a national identification number (NNI) and a UNHCR-issued refugee ID card. The NNI is required for opening bank accounts, accessing services and registering a business or civil status events. The [Decree 1128/MIDEC of 2020](#) also provides for the issuance of national refugee identity cards with an NNI by the government for all refugees in Mauritania. However, as of 30 June 2023, only 3,284 out of 58,570 refugees enrolled with ANRPTS had received Refugee Identification Cards. Moreover, as of September 2023, issuance of cards by the government has still not started in urban areas where 10,729 are already registered with UNHCR. Even though NNIs are inserted in the refugee cards issued by UNHCR, refugees have reported that in some cases authorities and other entities are not familiar with UNHCR-issued documents. Thus, it remains critical to address the backlog of ID cards both in Mbera camp and in urban areas. ANRPTS has committed to start issuing cards for registered out-of-camp refugees before the end of 2023.

As indicated above, access to civil registration for events such as birth registration is available for refugees

only after they have enrolled with ANRPTS and received an NNI. Since 2021, ANRPTS has only issued 171 birth certificates to refugees in Nouakchott and no birth certificates in Mbera or Nouadhibou, which exacerbate refugees' vulnerability to becoming stateless and being denied access to basic services and rights. This low rate of issuance of birth certificates is mainly due to ANRPTS' lack of capacity and the difficulty for refugees to fulfil the legal requirement of presenting the NNI of the two parents to obtain the certificate while a large number of families are single parents. To a lesser extent, the low rate is also due to the fact that some refugees (about 20 per cent of them in Mbera camp) give birth outside health facilities where no birth notifications are issued for civil status declaration. UNHCR is in discussion with the authorities to increase ANRPTS' capacity to support the Government's 2019 pledge at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness to provide birth certificates to all children born in Mauritania by 2024. Sensitization is also ongoing to raise awareness on the importance of documentation among refugees. Due to ANRPTS's lack of capacity, many refugees face challenges to access also other forms of civil documentation such as marriage, divorce and death certificates, especially in Mbera camp.

2.5 Justice and security

There is no comprehensive data available on refugees' level of security relative to that of Mauritanian nationals. However, despite being a country of transit and mixed and onward movements, and despite socio-economic and security challenges, Mauritania has maintained a relative open-door policy to refugees from Mali and continues to provide a relatively favorable and safe protection environment. The safety and security situation in the country remains generally good and UNHCR has not observed notable disparities in the level of security enjoyed by refugees and nationals. The feeling of insecurity is greater in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou than in Mbera camp (in 2022, only 6 per cent of refugees in Mbera camp felt insecure in the camp at night while 39 per cent felt insecure in urban areas, according to UNHCR data).

However, asylum-seekers and refugees remain at risk of being extorted, arbitrarily detained and discriminated against while trying to access basic services. The feeling of insecurity by people with diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC), women and girls, and people with disabilities are greater, especially in urban settings where the first two categories face sporadic discrimination and abuse at times solely based on their gender and physical appearances.

Refugees have access to civil, administrative and criminal justice. However, this mainly benefits urban refugees, since the presence of judicial institutions remains limited in Bassikounou. While communication barriers such as hearing, speaking and cognitive difficulties, mobility restrictions and lack of knowledge on rights and procedures also constitute obstacles to access to justice, El Insanya – UNHCR's national partner – provides legal counselling and representation in court, predominantly in relation to access to services, documentation, housing, civil and criminal proceedings.

Little progress has been observed to improve the legal framework for addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Efforts to pass a law for the prevention of violence against women and girls has stalled since 2018 despite an existing national strategy from 2012 developed with the support of UN agencies and the resumption of consultations on a draft law by the Government in 2019. The penal code (1983) and the law governing family (*Code du Statut Personnel*/CSP adopted in 2001) contain protective measures for women and girls (such as the prohibition of child marriage), but also provisions that condone GBV and discriminate against women regarding marriage and inheritance. For example, article 56 of CSP states that (1) the husband constitutes the head of household while a wife's role is to assist him in managing the family; (2) a divorced woman may see her children ordered to live with their father solely on the grounds that she chooses to remarry. Article 6 of the CSP allows guardians to contract some girls into marriage if their guardian deems the marriage in their "best interest". The legal age of marriage is 18; moreover, though article 9 requires a woman's consent in marriage, "the silence of a minor is considered her consent". The Penal Code prohibition of extramarital sexual relations (*zina* in sharia) continues to dissuade women and girls surviving rape from filing a complaint. The mandatory reporting of rape for public health personnel coupled with a restrictive interpretation and application of the law are additional deterrent for survivors to seek justice.

In practice, the [new National Health Development Plan](#), elaborated in 2021 and covering the period from 2022 to 2030, contains a “Fight against GBV” component, which was not the case in the previous plan (2017-2021). Moreover, government actors, including the Ministry for Social Affairs, Childhood and Family, continue to be involved in efforts to reduce Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). 12 per cent of girls under 5 years of age are circumcised in Mbera camp, which is well below the national average (21 per cent) (2021 SMART survey). Although national services to address GBV remain limited, refugees access them to a similar extent as nationals.

3. Economic Opportunities

3.1 Freedom of movement

There has been no change to the applicable legal and policy framework. Refugees have the right to move freely throughout Mauritanian territory and choose their place of residence without restrictions as stipulated in [Decree 063/2022](#). Refugees from Mbera camp are generally able to move to urban areas, and around 10 per cent of registered urban refugees were formerly living in Mbera camp. However, non-nationals — including non-registered individuals with refugee profiles — who are irregularly in the country remain at heightened risk of arrest due to lack of documentation, especially if suspected of intending to move irregularly to other countries (such as Morocco, Algeria, or Spain), including from Nouadhibou.

3.2 Right to work and rights at work

Refugees continue to face restrictions to access work opportunities due to the ongoing conflict between two labour-related decrees that the authorities have not addressed. For the same reason, there has not been progress in the implementation of the 2019 GRF pledge towards refugee equal access to the labor market as nationals.

[Decree 063/2022](#) allows refugees to seek wage-earning employment and provides for the same treatment as nationals regarding the private sector. These provisions have not yet been integrated into the national labour laws and come in conflict with [Decree 022/ Ministry of Public Service and Labour of 2022](#) which places restrictions on the employment of non-nationals and does not make an exception for refugees. In practice, however, some refugees have been able to access formal work contracts, but most employers are not aware that refugees can be employed on par with nationals. The effective implementation of the 2019 GRF pledge to give refugees the same access to the labour market as nationals requires the Government to formally clarify that the [Decree 022/2022](#) is not applicable to refugees and create mechanisms for the effective protection of their rights at work in both formal and informal sectors. Despite ongoing discussions with UNHCR, such clarification has not yet been formally provided by the authorities.

The [Decree 063/2022](#) further states that for liberal professions refugees should be treated on par with nationals of states that have the most favorable agreements for each profession. However, refugees studying at university continue to report difficulties to be employed in the health and education sectors also because they face challenges to have qualifications and experience previously acquired in countries of origin recognized. Finally, this Decree allows refugees to open businesses and register them under the same conditions as nationals.

No current data is available on the percentage of refugees employed in the informal sector, which continues to represent [more than 70 per cent](#) of economic activities in the country.

Economic well-being in Mauritania remains generally unequal between men and women, men being substantially more represented in the wealthiest part of the population (5 points difference in the top quintile – MICS [[Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey](#)] 2015). This likely denotes less access to decent well-paid work for women which equally applies to female refugees and asylum-seekers.

No available data exists regarding access to the labor market for people with diverse SOGIESC and/or people with disabilities. However, considering the difficulties faced by refugees and asylum-seekers in general, and the fact that same-sex relations constitute a crime in Mauritania, members of these groups are likely to experience further challenges in accessing the labor market. Anecdotal experience of members of the LGBTIQ+ communities approaching UNHCR establish that they are frequently dismissed from their already precarious employment if and when their sexual orientation or gender identity becomes known to their employer. Furthermore, there are reported cases of refugees and asylum-seekers with diverse SOGIESC resorting to survival sex in the absence of any employment (formal or informal) prospects or upon dismissal from work.

Whether formal or informal, access to work remains *de facto* limited for refugees. In 2021, the employment rate was only 14 per cent among refugees aged 18 to 59 in Mbera camp, well below the rate of host communities ([UNHCR/GIZ, 2023](#)).

In December 2020, with the support of the World Bank-funded [urbanization project](#), the Ministry of Economy and Promotion of Productive Sectors supported a local development plan for Mbera, which was the first attempt of the authorities to plan for the economic development of Mbera camp and develop job opportunities.

Pending the implementation of the 2019 GRF pledge on refugee access to the labour market, access to national employment services has been facilitated through a partnership between UNHCR (GIZ) and the national employment agency (*Techghil*) since 2022. This partnership has enabled *Techghil* to open an office in Bassikounou and has given refugees access to job placement and training opportunities in the urban centers of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. By early 2023, over 3,700 refugees were registered in *Techghil's* database, and 353 had benefited from training and internship opportunities.

3.3 Land, housing, and property rights

The application of the legal framework remains the same; refugees continue to face limited enjoyment of housing, land and property rights and to live under precarious conditions.

[Ordinance 83-127 of 1983](#) (*portant réorganisation foncière et domaniale*) stipulates that the land belongs to the nation and any Mauritanian can, by complying with the law, become a 'partial' owner. However, the Ordinance does not specify the terms and conditions of purchase, transfer or exploitation by non-nationals in general and by refugees in particular. Anecdotal information which UNHCR has received from refugees and partners points to a few cases where refugees have purchased land or property. To date, no census has been conducted on housing, land, and property rights for refugees in Mauritania. However, in 2022, 6% of refugees in host communities of Hodh Chargui reported living in a house they own ([UNHCR data](#)). In Mbera camp, there is not yet a formal recognition mechanism of the plots of land allocated to refugees. The Ministry in charge of urban planning envisages to establish, in 2024, a plan for Mbera camp (*Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme*), which may lead to a greater level of land security. While it is not expected that the SDAU will include an allotment of the land or precise modalities to secure access to lands, such as long-term leases or property rights, it represents a preliminary necessary step.

Weak land security in Mbera camp also prevents refugees from investing in more sustainable housing. In 2021, 80% of refugees lived in poor traditional housing (*M'bar*), 16% in precarious housing or huts, and none in houses ([UNHCR/GIZ, 2023](#)). In 2022, in urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou), 63% of the refugees reported living in houses, 23% in apartments and 14 per cent in precarious housing (tents, shops, etc.) ([UNHCR data, 2022](#)). In urban areas, information received from refugees indicates that they are moving more and more to outer parts of the main cities due to high rental costs while many face unscrupulous landlords who refuse to return their deposits, do not carry out essential repairs, force them to live in squalid conditions in their own rented home, or abusively evict them with limited or no notice. In such cases, refugees can access legal assistance through one of UNHCR's local partners.

3.4 Financial and administrative services

Refugees face no legal barrier to open bank accounts and access financial services, including mobile banking. However, in practice, refugees face obstacles to meet requirements to open bank accounts and access loans, which include the possession of a residence certificate (such as electricity/water bills) and an NNI. In practice, this excludes 35 per cent de facto of the refugees registered with UNHCR.

The Central Bank of Mauritania is finalizing a national financial inclusion strategy with the support of the Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI). In order to provide useful guidance to the upcoming national strategy and enhance financial inclusion of refugees, AFI visited Mbera camp in January 2023.

Access to financial services has improved with the opening, on 20 June 2023, of offices of a Mauritanian bank and a micro-finance institution in Mbera camp, which complements the opening of an office of the national agency for the promotion of savings and credit unions (*Agence de promotion des caisses populaires d'épargne et de crédit*, PROCAPEC) in Bassikounou in 2022. However, rates of use of the banking system remain low. In 2022, approximately 3% of refugees in urban areas and 6% in Mbera camp (UNHCR data) had a bank account. In practice, in 2022, 2,388 refugees of Mbera camp were bank account holders, of whom 1,357 had a digital bank account.

Access to digital bank accounts is hampered in Mbera camp by the lack of connectivity (less than 1% of the refugee household had access to internet in 2021, [UNHCR data](#)) and the limited possession of mobile phones (only 33% of refugee households had a mobile phone in 2021, [UNHCR data](#)).

There is still no specific policy governing the recognition or issuance of driving licenses for refugees. In practice, some refugees issued with an NNI have been able to obtain national driving licenses. Lack of NNIs can also be an obstacle to accessing SIM cards for mobile phones.

4. Access to National Public Services

Providers of basic services, such as within the health and education sectors, are more open to the inclusion of refugees than other sectors. The banking system is also gradually showing greater engagement with the refugee population in both camp and urban settings.

4.1 Education

Since June 2020, the education policy framework of refugees has remained the same but inclusion in the national education system for the learners in Mbera camp is gradually progressing. Mauritania has adopted a policy that allows the integration of refugee children into the national public system. [Decree 063/2022](#) as well as abrogated [Decree 022/2005](#) allow refugees to enrol in primary, secondary, and tertiary education under the same conditions as nationals. Refugee children generally are allowed to access pre-school, primary and secondary public schools as well as literacy and technical and vocational courses where they exist.

Gross enrollment rates for refugees are still rather low, well below the national rates, and have not substantially improved during the last three years. In 2022, 38 per cent of refugee children were enrolled in primary education (compared to 106 per cent gross enrollment rate [in Mauritania](#)), 8 per cent in secondary education ([40 per cent in Mauritania](#)) and 1 per cent in tertiary education. Refugee enrollment in public TVET centres is marginal but more than 1,000 refugee children have benefited from the ILO-led vocational training centre of Mbera camp, among which two dozen have passed a national TVET exam.

While girls have slightly better access than boys to primary and secondary education ([DHS, 2022](#)), refugee

girls have equal access to primary school (parity index between refugee girls and boys of 1.02 in Mbera camp) but much fewer opportunities than boys to attend secondary school (parity index of 0,51 in Mbera camp). Access to tertiary education remains marginal for young refugee women (parity index of 0.14). Men are also generally more literate than women at the national level ([DHS, 2022](#)), an even more pronounced trend among refugees (literacy rate of 27% for refugee women compared to 46 per cent for refugee men in Mbera camp, [UNHCR/GIZ, 2023](#)).

Refugee children in Mbera camp continue to attend schools funded by UNICEF and UNHCR, under the supervision of the Mauritanian Ministry of Education, and to follow the national educational curriculum of Mali. While the lessons in class in Mbera camp are still given in French under the Malian curriculum, the Mauritanian Government has committed to include all refugees into the national education system (2022-2032 Education and Training Sector Policy Letter). As a result, refugees have been included in the ongoing national assessment of the education sector (RESEN) and gradual inclusion is planned in the upcoming 2030 national education sector development plan (PNDSE III). As such, UNHCR is working with the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO) to assess the cost of the inclusion of refugees into the national education system through the identification of priority programs to ensure quality, access and efficient management, benefitting both refugees and locals. Close coordination is also ensured with UNICEF to work on a hybrid curriculum to support this transition. While the timeline has yet to be determined, it is expected that the Mauritanian education system will gradually be responsible for education services in Mbera camp in the coming years.

Refugees in urban areas already have access to education services, including both public and private schools. In Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, the Ministry of Education and UNHCR have continued the integration of urban refugee children into free-of-charge public schools. Nonetheless, the thousands of refugees living in host communities in Hodh Chargui have very limited access to public schools (6 per cent only in 2022, [UNHCR data](#)).

Effective access to the education system is hampered by language barriers, disruption to schooling due to the flight from the country of origin, lack of schools (in host communities of Hodh Chargui) and refugee household economic constraints.

4.2 Health care

The legal framework ensuring access to the public health system for refugees remained unchanged. [Decree 063/2022](#) as well as abrogated Decree 022/2005 provide refugees with access to the public health system under the same conditions as Mauritanian nationals. In practice, the handover of the facilities in Mbera to the health authorities has taken place in August 2020 through an inclusive approach towards the most vulnerable. While the [2022-2030 National Health Sector Development Plan \(PNDS\)](#) does not specifically mention refugees, in practice refugees can access public health facilities across the country.

In Mbera camp, since the handover of the facilities previously run by UNHCR to the Ministry of Health (MoH), refugees can access four public facilities. These facilities are supported by the World Bank-Inaya project which aims at strengthening the regional health system and ensuring access to the vulnerable population, including the most vulnerable refugees (more than 38,900 refugees are categorized as extremely vulnerable by the Mauritanian Social Registry in 2021). Refugees in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou can also receive free primary and secondary health care in 16 public facilities through UNHCR's reimbursement mechanism. Vulnerable refugees in host communities of Hodh Chargui can access health facilities but cannot benefit from subsidized health care as they have not yet been surveyed and registered by the Social Registry.

In 2023, the Government maintained its commitment to establish a universal health insurance system in its [2023 Declaration of General Policy](#). Refugees can access the national health insurance system (*Caisse Nationale de Santé Solidarité* – CNASS), currently tested in two districts of Nouakchott. Joint CNASS-UNHCR awareness-raising sessions for refugees living in Nouakchott were organized in spring 2023 to foster their enrolment. However, following a recent Decree of the MoH and Ministry of Finance regarding

contribution rates for the CNASS, their access on par with nationals remains to be confirmed.

To achieve full refugee inclusion in the Mauritanian health system, a roadmap drafted by the MoH, UNHCR and other humanitarian and development agencies is under final review as of June 2023. Given the limited capacities of the national health system in the Hodh Chargui region, this roadmap calls for increased investments and coordination to ensure inclusion for the benefit of refugees and host communities.

4.3 Social protection

While the [2012 National Social Protection Strategy](#) (*Stratégie Nationale de Protection Sociale*, SNPS) does not mention refugees nor specifically refers to social safety net programs for refugee-hosting areas, the Government is in the process of elaborating a new 2024-2034 strategy that takes into account refugee inclusion.

The modalities for access to some socioeconomic rights, including access to social security, remain defined in [Decree 063/2022](#) and abrogated [Decree 022/2005](#). Although the Decrees provides an entry point for the economic inclusion of refugees, access to formal work and therefore core social security rights (health and workplace accident insurance, right to retirement) remains very rare.

Since 2021, the World Bank-funded [Social Safety Net System Project II](#) has enabled more than 7,000 refugee households to benefit from public social assistance schemes (regular and shock-responsive cash transfers *Tekavoul* and *EIMaouna*) in Mbera camp and, to a lesser extent, in Nouadhibou. In December 2021 and spring 2023, refugees living in Nouakchott were also surveyed by the national Social Registry. Once the ongoing socio-economic targeting of some 5000 households is achieved, it is expected that the most vulnerable refugees will also benefit from regular cash transfers.

While the Government of Mauritania has gradually included the *Tekavoul* program in the national budget, fiscal appropriation to support cash transfers to refugees remains under consideration. The steady influx of refugees since 2021 requires regular socio-economic targeting by the Social Registry, in order to ensure that the most vulnerable newly arrived refugees are systematically included in *Tekavoul* and *EIMaouna*.

The UNHCR-GIZ project ([Building capacities for strengthened socio-economic inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable members of host communities in Mauritania – ‘ProNexus’](#)) and access to the services of the national employment agency (*Techghil*) have also contributed to improve the level of social protection for refugees in Mbera camp and surroundings, Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

4.4 Protection for vulnerable groups

As per the [2019 Declaration of General Policy](#) and in order to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the national strategy for child protection 2020-2025 and an operational action plan were finalized under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs, Childhood and Family Social Affairs (MASEF). The strategy and its action plan reaffirm the Government’s determination to protect and meet the needs of children living within its territory. They were adopted taking into consideration the recommendations for children on the move from a study commissioned by Save the Children in 2018 (*Enfants en Mobilité*) in support of the development of the National Strategy for Child Protection (2020-2025). This strategy will focus on strengthening the child protection system at national, regional, departmental, and local levels.

Although the capacity of the national care and protection systems remains very limited, unaccompanied and separated refugee children, refugee victims of trafficking, survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV) as well as other refugees with disabilities or diverse sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC), who are exposed to violence and exploitation, have access comparable to nationals in the same situation.

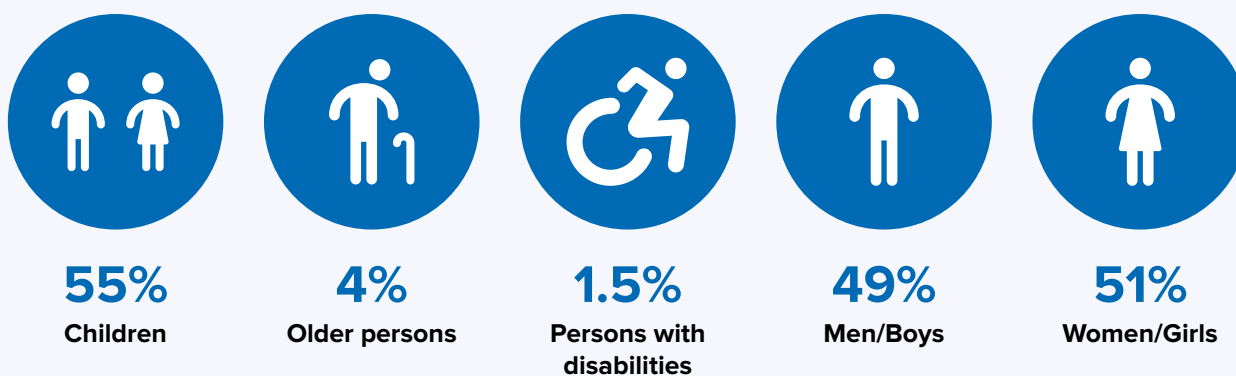
There has been no change in the legal framework protecting women and girls since the adoption of main pieces of legislation. The law ([ordinance 2005](#)) governing child protection and the [law on reproductive health](#) (2017) improved protection for women and girls and their rights, for example by prohibiting female genital mutilation (FGM) and ensuring access to reproductive health services for all. The draft law on combating violence against women approved by the Council of Ministers in May 2020 remains to be adopted by the Mauritanian legislature.

To support the Best Interest Determination (BID) process for refugee children, UNHCR, UNICEF and IOM participate in the BID panel led by the MASEF.

Mauritania has ratified the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol in 2012. Article 1 of the Constitution guarantees all citizens equality before the law, without discrimination. There is a department of Disability inclusion and federation of Organizations of Disabled Persons within the MASEF. The [2012 National Strategy on Social Protection](#) includes persons with disabilities in social protection schemes, but with limited funds. UNHCR works with the Disability Department of the MASEF and advocates for refugees and asylum-seekers' access to national services. Since 2021, vulnerable refugee households in the camp and in urban areas have been included in the national Social Registry and those living in Mbera and Nouadhibou are supported through cash transfers. This will soon also be the case for refugees in Nouakchott. Meanwhile, in 2021, 63 refugees with vulnerabilities living in Nouakchott were assisted with cash transfers by the MASEF thanks to a UNICEF project supported by BMZ.

5. Cross Sectors

Characteristics of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in total refugee population as of 30 June 2023



5.1 Gender

The 2021 and 2022 Global Gender Gap Reports from the World Economic Forum did not cover Mauritania to benchmark its progress towards gender parity. The country ranked 141 out of 153 countries in 2020 (WEF, 2020 [Global Gender Gap Report](#)). Economic participation and opportunities for women remain limited, with only around 30 per cent of Mauritanian women involved in the labour force and 43 per cent literacy rate. Different reports also show the needs with regard to gender equality. UNWOMEN reported in 2021 that only 20.3 per cent of seats in parliament were held by women. The 2021 World Bank report ([Gender Equality: A Necessary Condition for Promoting Inclusive Growth in Mauritania - WB Report](#)) in its chapter on gender inequality examined the main barriers to women's participation in the Mauritanian economy. It

noted that notwithstanding the progress made in the enrolment of girls in school, the latter obtained lower scores and had a lower level of educational attainment than boys. This was due, among other reasons, to early marriage and pregnancy. As a result, women have less access to good jobs and financing than men, in addition to restricted land rights. The current national law includes gender discriminatory provisions whereby Mauritanian women are still not able to transmit their nationality to their children and their foreign spouse on an equal basis with Mauritanian men. The most consequential policy sub-dimensions in terms of socioeconomic development remain therefore as follows:

- a. **Education:** female enrolment in primary and secondary education, particularly in Mbera camp remain lower than for males.
- b. **Justice and Security:** obstacles to prevent and address GBV persist.
- c. **Protection for Vulnerable Groups:** survivors of GBV as well as persons with disabilities have insufficient access to services.
- d. **Rights to Work and Rights at Work:** women continue to face challenges to access decent, and well-paid work.

5.2 Social inclusion

While the authorities have expressed a willingness to include refugees in national systems, current policy implementation has led to differing levels of refugee inclusion across sectors. National policies and initiatives in terms of access to the labour market and to the education system (PNDSE III) require additional adjustments and efforts in order to guarantee the effective inclusion of refugees. As mentioned above, the most consequential differences or restriction in terms of socioeconomic development affecting refugees are as follows:

- a. **Access to civil registration and documentation:** the current limitations impede refugees' access to several national services, work and financial inclusion.
- b. **Education:** significant progress needs to be made to achieve refugee inclusion in the education system (particularly in Mbera camp), including by ensuring the availability of adapted or accelerated learning programmes to address language barriers and disruption of schooling.
- c. **Housing, land, and property rights:** securing land for refugees in Mbera camp and an integrated territorial planning would foster refugee inclusion and support the local development of the district of Bassikounou.
- d. **Social protection:** despite strong progress, fiscal appropriation by the Mauritanian State regarding refugee inclusion in national safety nets and access of refugees to livelihoods opportunities need to be strengthened while access to the new health insurance (CNASS) on par with nationals remains to be confirmed and implemented.