

Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

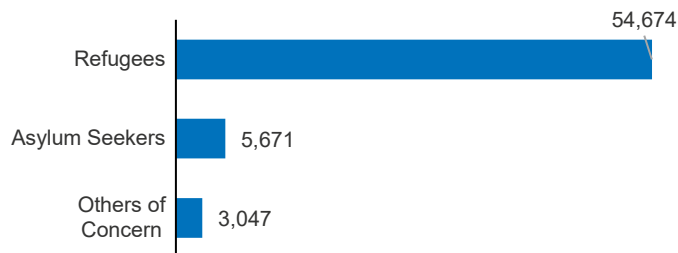
March 2024

54,674 refugees, **5,671** asylum seekers and **3,047** Others of Concern (children born of a refugee and Rwandan nationals) live in Mahama refugee camp located in Kirehe District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

Mahama refugee 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



SCI health staff provide a briefing on the nutrition services to refugee mothers and children to German Ambassador and UNHCR Representative during their visit to the Mahama Camp in March.



The USA Regional Refugee Coordinator visits the market in Mahama Camp during his visit in February.

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 consists of 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 primarily 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.
- 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. Between January and March 2024, UNHCR received 438 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 a protection hotline in Mahama refugee camp. 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 the first quarter of 2024, 133 cases were received via the protection hotline. The cases were about health, targeting, cash assistance, resettlement, and education.

- 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 and sector government officials, MINEMA and DGIE based in the camp. 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. 107 BIAs and 07 BIDs for resettlement consideration were conducted during the first quarter of 2024.
- For child protection, best interest assessments (BIAs) and BID 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. As of March 2024, 12 Children have been reunified with their parents from Mahama camp (in-country reunifications). UNHCR and partners also conduct meetings to address complicated cases through case conference and by March 2024, 09 cases were addressed.
- 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.
- 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 community, 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. By March 2024, the Ideas Box centre in the camp served 6,546 persons including children with disabilities and older persons in multimedia, library, and cinema.
- Between January and March 2024, 326 children with disabilities benefited from rehabilitation services including those from host community. 236 persons with mental health and psychosocial issues also received mental health services and psychosocial through HI programmes, while 163 people were received at the CBP help desks with different issues including theft, family conflicts, health, and request for clothes.
- 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 assistance.
- Between January and March 2024, 710 individuals were deactivated in UNHCR's proGres database for several reasons including resettlement, death, and spontaneous departure, while 17 were reactivated after being cleared by the continuous registration panel (CRP). In total throughout the reporting period, 613 individuals were newly registered in Mahama camp

consisting of 552 new-born babies and 70 new arrivals (both refugees and asylum seekers). 827 new proof of registration documents were re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition. 589 addresses and 761 refugees IDs were updated in UNHCR's database during the reporting period.

- On 06 March, Congolese refugees residing in Mahama RC, supported by a few Burundian refugee representatives, conducted a peaceful demonstration in Mahama refugee camp to denounce the ongoing killing of Kinyarwanda speaking Congolese living in DRC, while calling for intervention from the international community to support peace to prevail in DRC to enable them return home.
- On 12 March, UNHCR jointly with partners, government counterparts, refugee executive committee and the wider refugee community celebrated International Women's Day in Mahama camp under the international theme: "Invest in women: Accelerate progress" and the national theme: "30 years: Women in the country's development". Besides speeches, different activities were conducted including drama, modern dance, testimonies shared from refugee women and women's exhibitions. Awards were given to four best performing girls enrolled in TVET and one self-reliant women selected by the Refugee Executive Committee.

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 regularly supports the enrolment and attendance of refugees and asylum seekers at Paysannat L. In collaboration with WVI and the school management, UNHCR continues to monitor learning and teaching of refugee students at the school. As of March, a total 13,564 refugee children (6,864 male and 6,700 female) are enrolled in primary school with 98 percent attendance rate, while 6,030 (3,212 male, and 2,818 female) are enrolled in secondary with 96 percent attendance. In addition, 5,594 (2,799 male and 2,795 female) children aged between 3 to 5 years old are enrolled in Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in the camp with 99 percent of attendance.
- 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 is fully integrated in the Government of Rwanda program, whereby WFP directly supports the Government to subsidize 90 percent of the cost of refugee school meals. UNHCR 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.
- To support students in Paysannat L school study science combinations, the Government of Rwanda, working through Kirehe district and the school administration have started the construction of a science lab through the World Bank Jya Mbere project. UNHCR also completed construction of 28 classrooms in Mahama camp in February 2024. In addition, construction of water facilities at ECD centre is at the final stage of construction and will be in use in the coming quarter.
- As of March, 574 refugee students are enrolled in different boarding schools (schools of excellence) across Rwanda whereby the costs are paid by different education partners (50 UNHCR/World Vision, 213 Maison Shalom, 141 Impact Hope Rwanda and 170 self-sponsored).

Students are also enrolled in TVET (Technical and Vocational Centres) under sponsorship from Masion Shalom, Rwanda Red Cross and GIZ.

- 64 refugee students from Mahama camp are enrolled in different universities including under sponsorships from UNHCR's DAFI program. Other refugee students are also supported by Mastercard Foundation and Kepler to attain tertiary education.
- During the school holidays, different sport tournaments (basketball, football, and volleyball) were organized with the intention of "Encouraging children and youth to go back to school". During those activities UNHCR, SCI staff, volunteers and sport facilitators spread various messages to children on the importance of attending school.
- In January, Impact Hope in collaboration with UNHCR, WVI, MINEMA Mobile Library launched mobile library at Paysannat L E school in Mahama with the objective of boosting a reading culture among students.

Health and Nutrition

- UNHCR provides primary health care services in at two health centres in Mahama camp which are run in cooperation with SCI. Healthcare services available include outpatient consultations, immunization for children under 5 years old and pregnant women, reproductive healthcare, 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. As of March, 25,648 consultations at primary healthcare clinics have taken place so far in 2024 with an average of 50 persons/clinician. Where additional treatment is needed, UNHCR facilitates and covers the costs of referrals to secondary and tertiary health care outside the camp. 311 patients were referred to secondary and tertiary healthcare level between January and March.
- Mahama II health centre is a medicalized health centre (since 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 and referred to Kirehe District hospital for urgent complicated cases. As of March, 519 newborn babies have been born at the health centre including 95 through C-section.
- 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.
- 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.
- During the month of March, SCI Health team in close collaboration with Kirehe District organized and conducted a Health Week in all sectors including Mahama refugee camp, under the theme, "UBUZIMA BUZIMA AKABANDO K'IMINSI". The health week aimed at prioritization of community well-being and promoting a culture of health and wellness with the district catch mate area through encouraging people to adopt a healthier lifestyle i.e. by promoting physical activity, balanced nutrition and mental well-being of population.

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 based on UNHCR data. In 2024, the highly vulnerable category (73% of the refugees) receive RWF 8,500 per person per month, and the moderately vulnerable category (7% of the refugees) receive RWF 4,200. Between January and March, 185 refugees approached UNHCR appealing their categorization for assistance and requesting for their household's eligibility group to be changed to the highly vulnerable category. Counselling was provided to the families.

- In addition to cash assistance for food, WFP runs a variety of supplementary feeding programmes for the most vulnerable refugees including children under 5 years, expectant and breastfeeding mothers, the elderly, and those with several chronic illnesses. Newly arrived asylum seekers in Mahama refugee camp who are accommodated at the departure centre upon their arrival are also provided with in-kind food. Between January and March, 275 individuals were assisted with hot meals at the departure centre.

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.
- An average of 1,331 m³ of water is supplied daily of which 1,276m³ is distributed to refugees in the camp at an average of 20.2 litres per person per day and 56 m³ distributed to the host community. UNHCR alongside the partners continues to carry out operational and maintenance of the water treatment plant and the water supply system in the camp and host community.
- Mahama camp has 3,398 blocks of communal latrines that also include showers. This equates to 18.3 persons per drop hole/ per shower room (against the standard of 20 persons).
- Hygiene promotion activities are conducted through community hygiene clubs in Mahama camp. UNHCR and partners also ensure the implementation of the national Community Based Environmental and Hygiene Promotion Program model which empowers the community to adopt good practices. UNHCR in partnership with WVI distributed 950 litres of liquid soap to public places including markets, camp entrances, gas distribution site, registration centre and departure centre.
- Between January and March, 1,038 cubic meters (m³) of sludge were collected from latrine septic tanks across the camp and disposed at the waste dumpsites. In addition, 1,392 m³ of garbage was collected and disposed of at the waste dumping.
- On 27 March, UNHCR with AYATEKE and World Vision International Celebrated World Water Day in the Mahama Camp.

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 average-size families). UNHCR supports refugee households to keep their shelter in good condition. As of March, 79 shelters have been rehabilitated with new roof, doors, and windows so far in 2024.
- On a periodic 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. Due to the lack of funds, there has been no distribution of cash assistance for NFIs since March 2023.
- UNHCR distributes NFIs in-kind (kitchen sets, clothes, soap, jerry cans etc.) to refugees and asylum seekers of different nationalities who are transferred from urban areas to Mahama camp as well as to Congolese asylum seekers who are relocated from other camps. Between January and March, 96 households of 160 individuals received kitchen sets. Blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans and cooking pots were also distributed to asylum seekers and refugees transferred from urban areas to help them settle into their new environment.
- In the first quarter of 2024, UNHCR also distributed 8,724 pieces of clothing to 636 refugee and asylum seeker households comprised of 2,181 individuals including children with disabilities (refugees & host community) and single women.

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 13,218 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. On average, UNHCR distributes 96,452 kgs of gas to refugees and asylum seekers every month. In addition, an average of 1,423kg LPG a month was provided at the departure centre to cook hot meals for the asylum seekers during the reporting period.
- To support the productive use of energy in Mahama Refugee camp, Practical Action runs a Renewable Energy for Refugees programme. So far in 2024, Practical Action has sold 21 improved cooking stoves and 8,975kg of clean cooking pellets in the camp and the host community to mitigate climate change and be a sustainable back up alternative for LPG.
- As of March, in partnership with WVI, 15,779 people were reached during the environmental protection promotion activities through community work and household visits. Moreover, refugee casual workers, in collaboration with WVI, planted 942 bamboos in Akagera River buffer zone to protect the river from soil erosion effects and 207 senna spectabilis were planted for general environmental protection purpose. Additional activities were conducted including watering, spraying, and weeding of trees for environment protection.

Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion

- In support of refugee self-reliance, UNHCR supports refugee entrepreneurship and employment in Mahama refugee camp. Through funding from Denmark and in partnership with Caritas Rwanda, UNHCR has provided start-up grants to 669 refugees and 287 Rwandan host community members in Mahama refugee camp to start their businesses in 2022 and 2023. In 2024, UNHCR and Caritas Rwanda continue to support these entrepreneurs through coaching and mentorship. 944 individuals participated in a refresher training on financial literacy and Saving Internal Lending Community Groups (SILC) methodology between January and March.
- During the first quarter of 2024, Caritas in collaboration of Conference Episcopale Justice et Paix Rwanda (CEJPR) provided 15 tailoring machines to a tailoring group of 20 young women worth 14.5 million RWF following their completion of 6 months of tailoring and entrepreneurship training.
- During the reporting period, ALIGHT conducted a livelihood economic inclusion assessment for 20 livelihoods projects. In addition, they supported refugees participating in four types of livelihoods projects (mushroom cultivation, soap making, tailoring and rabbit rearing) to participate in the MTN Connecting Women competition at Kigali, where each project won a prize with the mushroom project placing first.
- On the 28 March, ALIGHT facilitated and supported 14 students from the coding school during the school graduation ceremony that took place in Kigali. They were provided a start-up kit, including a computer per graduate, to support them with future livelihood opportunities.

Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,382 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from Mahama refugee camp. In February, UNHCR and partners supported 75 individuals to voluntary repatriate to Burundi.
- Between January and March 2024, UNHCR submitted 288 refugee cases for resettlement from Mahama camp. In addition, 653 refugees departed the camp to resettlement countries including the US, Belgium, Canada and Norway