MAURITANIA

Today, the country hosts around 288,000 refugees and asylum seekers, with 162,000 formally registered with UNHCR and the Mauritanian civil registry (ANRPTS), including 28,000 Malian refugees registered in hosting villages in Hodh Chargui (of the 154,000 estimated refugees), and 116,000 Malian refugees in Mbera camp.Since the beginning of the influx in January 2023, UNHCR estimates that 170,000 Malians sought safety in Hodh Chargui region.

At the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023, the Government of Mauritania (GoM) reiterated its 2019 pledges (to enact an asylum law, facilitate refugees' access to documentation, healthcare and employment on par with nationals) and further committed to include refugees in national social protection and education systems, as well as to transform Mbera camp into an integrated and sustainable human settlement, providing a unique opportunity for sustainable responses.

The Government of Germany has pledge-matched the GoM's pledge on social protection.

VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMMING IN MAURITANIA

UNHCR's vision for sustainable responses in Mauritania recognises all forcibly displaced and stateless people in Mauritania, regardless of their location and vulnerability as having the potential to thrive and contribute positively to their environment and local communities. As such, all components of UNHCR's programming contribute to GoM's overall development strategy (Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity/SCAPP, 2016-2030), GRF pledges, and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF).

§ A multi-sectoral, multi-partner response to the refugee situation in Hodh Chargui is coordinated through the Refugee Coordination Forum (RCF) in close cooperation with GoM – to facilitate the emergency response and a smooth transition to a response anchored in development approaches that promote gradual inclusion of refugees in national systems. The RCF is led by UNHCR and plays a catalytic role in bringing together UN agencies, development actors, donors, and civil society in Hodh Chargui.

PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMMING

Pillar I: Enabling protection, legal and policy environment.

Despite the absence of formal asylum system, GoM implements progressive policies towards refugees, including legal provisions that grant them access to social services and the ability to seek employment or start businesses, although implementation challenges persist.

A 2022 MoU between UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior formalises UNHCR's role in Refugee Status Determination (RSD) until an asylum system is established, enhancing refugee protection against arrest, detention, and refoulement, and extending the issuance of national refugee IDs to urban areas.

UNHCR supports GoM in adopting a national asylum law through technical support and collaboration, while leveraging GRF pledges and non-transactional development partnerships to expand protection and inclusion, such as the 2024-2027 roadmap for including refugees in national health plans signed with the Ministry of Health.

Pillar II: Inclusion from the start during emergency phase and progressively phasing out parallel systems.

GoM's 2018 Policy Letter on Development emphasizes economic opportunities, social protection, and basic services for refugees and host communities, demonstrating a transition from pure humanitarian to development approaches.

The 2023 refugee response plan for Malian refugees in Hodh Chargui and the 2025 Resilience and response plan for refugees in Hodh Chargui adopts a multi-sectoral approach, combining immediate humanitarian aid with long-term development approaches to foster resilience.

Efforts to integrate refugees into national health services include the World Bank's (WB) INAYA project, which, since 2020, has transferred health facilities to the Ministry of Health, reducing medical consultation costs and improving quality.

Participatory community planning ensures inclusive interventions, exemplified by the construction of a health centre in Bousteilla, funded by INTPA and managed by local authorities. Sustainable responses and long-term success require continued support to integrate refugees into national systems, through sectoral investments that ensure quality of basic services, parity with nationals, and strengthened local capacity.

Pillar III: Transforming refugee settlements into economic hubs.

In line with its inclusive policy, the GoM pledged at the GRF 2023 to transition Mbera camp into an integrated, climate-adapted settlement by 2027, guided by an urbanisation plan from the Ministry of Housing, Urbanism, and Territorial Planning to improve land allocation and housing quality.

UNHCR supports this transition by integrating Mbera's basic services into national systems, aiming to include water, sanitation, and electricity by 2027, and education by 2034.

Project Flow, a new initiative underway to replace diesel pumps with solar-powered ones, will enhance clean water provision, electricity to schools, while reducing CO2 emissions, thanks to funding from the Grundfos Foundation and Danish and German governments.

These efforts are complemented by reforestation and clean cooking initiatives, and the support from the UN Gender Accelerator in empowering women and girls in decision-making.

These initiatives aim to transform Mbera into a planned settlement that allow refugees to contribute to local development.

Pillar IV: Promoting economic and financial inclusion by creating markets and strengthening private sector engagement.

A sustainable response approach has significantly increased financial inclusion for refugees in Mauritania, with the bank penetration rate rising from 0% in 2020 to 16,69% in 2024.

Refugees are included in the national strategy on financial inclusion (2023-2028), and Mbera camp is seen as a key market for this initiative due to its untapped value chains, the strong presence of the financial sector, community willingness for self-reliance, and supportive regulatory frameworks.

With employment rates for refugees in the camp at 12%, compared to 37% for host communities, their access to national employment services (job platform and training) through Techghil represent an important step in progress towards economic inclusion.

Key employment sectors for refugees include livestock, services, commerce, agriculture, handicrafts, and construction. UNHCR collaborates with development actors like GIZ and UN agencies like ILO to enhance long-term livelihood, business, and work opportunities.

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ENABLERS OF SUSTAINABLE PROGRAMMING

1 Responsibility sharing and financing.

To implement its generous inclusion policy, Mauritania has leveraged diverse financing sources, including US$67 million from the WB's International Development Association (IDA) replenishment as well as partnerships with BMZ/GIZ, EU, UN Peacebuilding Fund, Korean International Cooperation Agency, and African Development Bank in the sectors of health, water, sanitation, social protection, and local development.

Sustaining progress requires international support through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDP) nexus, fund mobilization via mechanisms like IDA replenishments, and matching of GRF pledges.

2 Promoting a whole of government leadership of the refugee and IDP response

TThe Consultative National Commission for Refugees and Persons to Protect (CNCRPP) serves as Mauritania's key inter-ministerial body overseeing refugee management and coordination, facilitating engagement with GoM on international commitments and addressing issues like documentation, mixed movements, joint registration of Malian refugees, and statelessness prevention.

Established in 2021, the Commission is led by the Director-General of Territorial Administration (Ministry of Interior) and meets quarterly with active participation from relevant sectoral ministries to integrate refugees into national services and development initiatives, particularly in Mbera camp.

Refugee inclusion is prominently featured in the action plan (2021-2025) of Mauritania's SCAPP (2016-2030) and supported by the UNSDCF.

The UN Country Team (UNCT) in Mauritania, led by the Resident Coordinator, also participates in the UN common pledge 2.0 from the GRF 2023, underscoring collective commitment to refugee inclusion efforts.

3 Partnership and Coordination across the HDP Nexus.

Coordination among various stakeholders is crucial for advancing the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in Mauritania, as no single entity can achieve this alone.

In regions facing chronic crises, the UNCT promotes synergy between humanitarian, development, and peace-building efforts to empower communities and bolster local governance.

Refugee-led organizations (RLOs) play pivotal roles as UNHCR partners in Mauritania, actively participating in planning and implementing activities.

In the camp, UNHCR's collaboration with over 20 RLOs enables refugees to contribute as agents of change, ensuring interventions are responsive to community needs across protection, social cohesion, environmental conservation, WASH, and healthcare sectors.

Joint initiatives with UN agencies also contribute to the Mauritania's GRF pledges. Additionally, collaboration with the Government, the WB, GIZ and WFP also facilitated the enrolment of refugee households in the national Social Registry and the inclusion of vulnerable refugees in Tekavoul (social protection programme), essential to enhancing their resilience and reducing vulnerability.

4 Data and evidence.

UNHCR has spearheaded various data and evidence initiatives, such as assessing access to basic services for refugees outside camps and collaborating through the WFP-UNHCR Joint Hub.

The 2019 GRF pledge on documentation was updated in 2023 to include refugees in national statistics, enacted through upcoming surveys like the Multi-indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), Permanent Survey on Living Conditions (EPVC), and Labour Force Survey conducted by Mauritania's National Agency for Statistics and Economic Analysis (National Statistical Office, ANSADE) in partnership with the WB and UNHCR.

These efforts align with sustainable responses, enhancing the quality of data collection for socio-economic comparisons with nationals and supporting UNHCR's evidence-based approach.

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GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

Strategic partnership: World Bank IDA-18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities

Mauritania became eligible for the WB IDA-18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities (RSW) in November 2017.

This initiative supports refugee inclusion across healthcare, social safety nets, water management, sanitation, local development, and urbanization, with potential additional support through the IDA-20 Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR). UNHCR provided technical support to align WB programs with refugee needs, establishing a strategic partnership.

Projects under the IDA-18 Refugee Sub-Window, including those in health, urbanization, social protection, and water sanitation, aim to enhance effectiveness and efficiency in social safety nets and expand water and sanitation services, benefiting both refugee and host communities.

This strategic partnership under IDA-18 has increased the presence of development actors, who have put in place complementary interventions.

UNHCR and GIZ also collaborated through the ProNexus project since 2021, with ProNexus 2.0 currently being launched and focuses on access to basic services, social protection, economic inclusion and social cohesion, in line with the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and HDP nexus principles, guided by BMZ and UNHCR's shared vision.