Development approaches in Forced Displacement Settings

May 2025

Aljamaway Walet Sabou, a Malian refugee who fled Mali to seek safety in Mauritania, tends to her plot in the market gardening cooperative at the edge of Mbera camp. There, refugees, mainly women, cultivate small plots to strengthen their livelihoods, support their families, and help maintain the vitality of the land. ©UNHCR/OMAR DOUKALI

Development approaches at UNHCR refers to the inclusion of refugees in national systems, through the actions and processes of ensuring that refugees have access to national services and opportunities, in accordance with international law and practice. This inclusion process recognizes that it is the State's primary responsibility to protect but takes a whole-of-society and community-based protection approach recognizing the critical role of civil society, development and private sector actors. The inclusion process emphasizes national law and policy frameworks but is anchored in international norms and standards to prevent promoting inclusion practices that discriminate or violate the very norms and standards that UNHCR is mandated to supervise and promote.

The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) has brought new impetus to support States in their protection obligations. It proposes transformative approaches to advance inclusion with larger coalitions of partners. While the Refugee Convention and other international legal obligations focus on the rights of refugees and States' responsibilities to protect, they do not specify how these responsibilities be shared.

Development partnerships have been instrumental in supporting host governments to advance the inclusion of refugees in national services and local economies.

Data on Mauritania Operation

UNHCR has worked to foster and strengthen these collaborations, yielding significant progress in addressing forced displacement issues by establishing dedicated financing instruments and integrating forced displacement into development strategies, response plans, socio-economic data collection, and policy dialogues with governments. There is also growing recognition of the role that the private sector can play in supporting displaced and host communities to become self-reliant and access essential social and economic services.

UNHCR's operational objectives in Mauritania

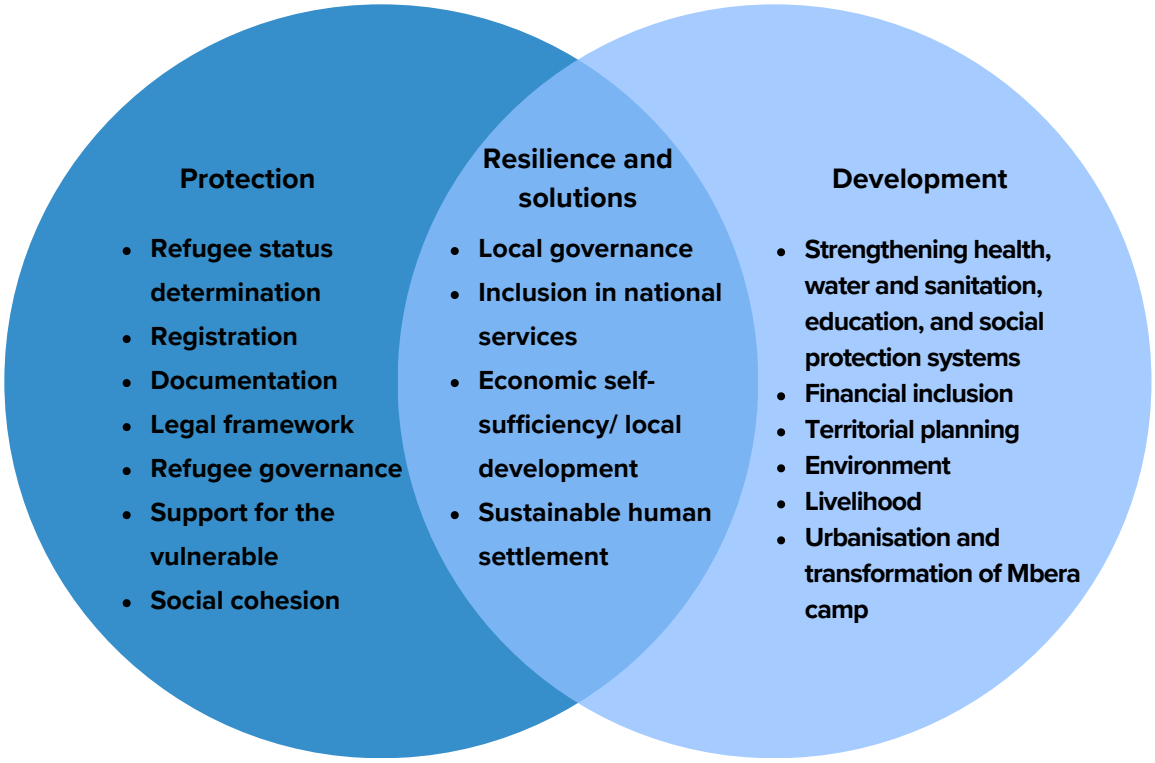
The refugee response in Mauritania focuses not only on core protection and humanitarian responses but also on several other priorities aimed at securing durable solutions for refugees[1]:.

The operational objectives of UNHCR Mauritania are:

1. Protect refugees and respond to their humanitarian needs,

2. Include them in national systems, empower them to build their self-reliance and find long term solutions for their displacement.

UNHCR in Mauritania has developed a multiyear strategy (2023-2026) articulated around protection and solutions for all forcibly displaced populations residing in Mauritania. The objectives and interventions are aligned with the **Global Compact on Refugees**, which represents the political will and ambition of the international community for strengthened cooperation and solidarity with refugees and affected host countries.



UNHCR's humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach in Mauritania

UNHCR leads, in accordance with the Refugee Coordination Model, the **humanitarian response to refugee needs** in Mauritania, including support for **emergency preparedness** in the Hodh Chargui region and along the southern border of Mauritania with Mali.

In November 2017, Mauritania became eligible for the World Bank IDA-18 Regional Sub-Window for Refugees and Host Communities, enabling increased humanitarian and development cooperation and refugee inclusion in the areas of health care, social safety nets, water management and sanitation, local development and urbanization. Additional support through the IDA-20 Sub-Window for Host Communities and Refugees (WHR) is being considered.

An example of the success of the inclusion approach, through World Bank funding, with the cost per consultation significantly decreasing, from 48 USD in 2018 with MSF to just 9 USD in 2023 with UNHCR. This reduction in costs is also accompanied by a drastic improvement in service quality, demonstrating the impact of development.

1 For more information on UNHCR Mauritania's Country 2025 Strategy, visit Global Focus https://reporting.unhcr.org/mauritania#toc-narratives Global Focus."

During the **Global Refugee Forum** of December 2023, key pledges were made by the Government of Mauritania, namely on access to social protection, inclusion of refugees in national education systems and the transformation of Mbera refugee camp into a sustainable human settlement. The Government of Mauritania also renewed its 2019 pledges, relating to access to national health systems, the development of a legal framework for refugees, access to documentation and access to the labour market.

In this context, UNHCR plays a crucial role in supporting the efforts of the Government of Mauritania, sister UN agencies, development actors, donors, refugees themselves and other partners such as the Alliance Sahel, in full alignment with the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and the UN Integrated Vision for Joint Action in the Hodh Chargui region, to ensure **greater socio-economic inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national service delivery systems**.

Moreover, as part of this objective and to facilitate a smooth transition from a humanitarian refugee response to the gradual inclusion of refugees, UNHCR works with partners to ensure transparency in the management of integrated development projects in areas hosting refugees.

Hamama Ag Mohamed El Haj, a 25-year-old Malian refugee, arrived at Mbera camp in 2012 after fleeing violence. In 2024, with support from KOICA and UNHCR, he launched an environmentally conscious laundry service, offering essential services to refugees and host communities while promoting resilience and self-reliance.©UNHCR/OMAR DOUKALI

Discover how refugee-led initiatives are strengthening resilience and self-reliance in Mbera camp.

The aim of socio-economic inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers in national systems is to enhance self-reliance in situations of forced displacement. UNHCR works with partners to ensure:

- Access to quality social services is maintained for the most vulnerable.
- Support to accompany increased interventions of government actors and expansion of development activities including refugees.
- Investment in climate and environmental activities, supporting natural resources, development, plans for reforestation, access to water and sustainable sources of energy.
- Promotion of labour and economic development by anchoring in local development plans and larger investments.

M'hamed Yahia, a nurse from Mauritania, began his career in 2014 as a nursing intern before becoming a State Registered Nurse. In 2024, with the support of the Sheikha Fatima Foundation and the Ministry of Health, he joined the telemedicine unit in Mbera camp, facilitating virtual medical consultations with doctors located over 1,200 kilometers away. M'hamed supports both the medical and technical aspects of the service, contributing to improved healthcare access for refugees and host communities. ©UNHCR/OMAR DOUKALI

Global Refugee Forum Pledges	Current Status	Next Steps	Final prospect
Documentation (Protection)	In the camp, more than 67% of refugees have a national identification number (NNI) (as of Dec 2024). Approximately 3% of refugees in the camp have received an ID card, however due to the suspension of physical card distribution, some have already expired, likely overestimating the figure as of May 2025. Out of camp, 40% of refugees have an NNI. No ID card has been delivered out of camp.	Support governmental (ARNPTS) efforts to deliver NNI and ID cards.	100% of refugees with an NNI 100% of refugees with an ID card
	Partial inclusion of refugees in national surveys and data systems. Refugees are part of the national census of the population.	Refugees to be included in the EPCV and LFS, and plans to include in MICS and EHCVM.	National statistics, which include refugees, are used to inform policy decisions.
Health (Development)	Refugees in Mbera camp and the host communities benefit from sustainable healthcare access provided by government-run primary care facilities. Newly arrived out-of-camp refugees benefit from existing healthcare services and mobiles clinics. Refugees with severe conditions that cannot be treated at the primary care are referred to secondary and tertiary facilities (in Bassiknou, Néma or Nouakchott) Telemedecine is available in Mbera camp and Bassiknou, allowing remote access to specialiste care UNHCR health strategy is being finalized to guide interventions over the next 5 years, aligned with the Health roadmap.	Downgrading of UNHCR supported health activities to allow resource allocation, resulting in an increase of out-of-pocket by refugees. Inclusion of out-of-camp refugees in the INAYA ELARGI project (Ministry of Health project, in collaboration with UNHCR and the World Bank). Construction of the public medicine store (Centrale d'Approvisionenement en Médicament et Consommable Médicaux (CAMEC)), creating access to subsidized medicines to refugees and host communities.	Refugees have access to sustainable health services provided by the Ministry of Health on par with nationals, and national systems have been strengthened.
Economic self-reliance (Development)	Refugees face difficulties in accessing formal jobs. National employment services (Techghil) are accessible to refugees. Increasing availability of financial services and increasing use of bank accounts (but limited access to loans) - 16,7% of refugees have a bank account or mobile money service. Refugees have limited access to public vocational/technical training services. Training and (green) jobs programmes are developed in Hodh Chargui.	Refugees can access job creation programmes on par with nationals. Refugees can better access formal jobs through enhanced employers' and national labour services' awareness and the reduction of administrative barriers. UNHCR continues to support banks and financial institutions in the promotion campaigns for refugees to open bank accounts	Refugees' self-reliance increases through access to effective and large-scale job creation programmes, training and employment services. Financial inclusion and employability of refugees is strengthened (removal of administrative hurdles, increased access to loans).
Asylum Law (Protection)	An asylum bill was drafted in 2016, but it is still pending and has not yet been adopted into law as it needs to be reviewed to ensure it is in line with international norms and standards.	UNHCR provides technical support to the government for the adoption of an asylum law and necessary regulations.	Mauritania has an asylum law
Social protection (Development)	Vulnerable refugees receive targeted support from UNHCR and WFP. Refugees in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Mbera camp are included in the national Social Registry (since 2021). Out of camp refugees are included in the preliminary targeting of the national integral update of the social registry (since 2024).	All refugees are included in the national integral update of the social registry (out of camp, camp and urban areas). 5000 households (50% refugees) have access to a comprehensive economic inclusion programme, and social safety net, by the WB and GoM.	Social protection services supported by more diversified stakeholders, including Government-run programmes. Refugees are included in all national social protection programmes.

Global Refugee Forum Pledges	Current Status	Next Steps	Final prospect
Social protection (Development)	Government-run social transfer services (Tekavoul) serve 7 408 vulnerable refugees in and around Mbera camp. Amount of cash transfer from the national social assistance programme Tekavoul has been aligned between nationals and refugees as of Q3 2024.	Pilot of dynamic targeting of the social registry includes Fassala and Bousteila, communes with high concentration of refugees. A national roadmap on inclusion of refugees in national social protection plans is adopted by TAAZOUR. Refugees are included in the National Social Protection Strategy (SNPS II) 2024-2034.	
Education (Development)	Refugees follow the Malian curriculum in the camp coordinated by UNHCR and UNICEF. Education in Mbera camp is supported by humanitarian funding. Refugees residing outside the camp in rural and urban areas attend local schools with ad hoc UNHCR support. Refugee inclusion is costed and included in the national education strategy (PNDSE 3).	The gradual transition from Malian to Mauritanian curriculum starts (school year 2025-2026, Mbera camp). A roadmap for refugee inclusion in the national education sector, adopted by the government, is gradually operationalised in cooperation with partners. Supporting out of camp and urban refugees to facilitate their inclusion in national schools. Follow up implementation of the PNDSE 3 to ensure that refugee inclusion activities are carried out.	Refugees are gradually integrated in the national education system in Mbera camp. Refugee children have access to quality education. Out of camp and urban refugees are fully included in national schools . Refugee inclusion is effective throughout Mauritania.
Environment, Energy, and WASH (Development)	WASH systems are mostly funded by UNHCR in Mbera camp. Environmental protection is funded by humanitarian and small-scale funding streams. Refugees use non-renewable energy sources, such as wood or charcoal, for cooking, which has a negative impact on both the environment and health. Refugees have access to Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and biogas solutions in the camp. Activities of preservation and restoration of natural resources include reforestation and fire prevention and management.	The transfer of WASH systems to the government to be effective by end 2025. Access to WASH services is maintained for all refugees, and construction of the latrines in progress, by a World Bank project. Solarisation of boreholes is underway. Increase usage of clean energy (LPG) for cooking, through an innovative micro-savings product offering. Electrification, and roads construction, connecting the camp and other neighbouring areas, to enter implementation in 2025.	Environment and the related ecosystems are protected and preserved. Energy and WASH systems and government-run. Access to land titles is secured, and improved housing conditions for refugees.
Urbanisation and local development of Hodh Chargui, including Mbera camp (Development)	Territorial planning and decongestion of Mbera camp by UNHCR.	The Ministry of Urban planning elaborates an urban plan (SDAU) by 2025. MOUDOUN project, supported by UNHCR and World Bank (details in Annex) of the Ministry of Urban Planning contributes to these initiatives.	Mbera camp is transformed into a sustainable and integrated human settlement.
Crosscutting	Refugee coordination model is fully functional. In the Hodh Chargui region, coordination mechanisms held at regional and district levels include refugee issues.	In the Hodh Chargui region, coordination mechanisms held at regional and district levels allow enhanced coordination for greater refugee inclusion (undergoing for out of camp refugees).	The coordination of humanitarian interventions and development activities ensure that social cohesion (nexus) is strengthened.

Annex I - UNHCR projects with development partners

Ongoing projects:

World Bank projects (non-transactional relationship with UNHCR):

Water & Sanitation - WASH
March 2020 – November 2025
$44m incl. $14m from Refugee Sub-Window (RSW)
Objective : Increase access to improved water and sanitation services in selected rural areas and small towns (including Mbera camp) and strengthen the performance of sector institutions.

Health - INAYA
Phase 1: May 2017 – December 2023
Phase 2: Janvier 2024 - 2030
$23m incl. $15m from RSW
Objective: Scale up the Performance-Based Financing (PBF) system Inaya to improvethe utilization and quality of reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and child health and nutrition services in Hodh Chargui, benefiting refugees and the Mauritanian host population by addressing health needs of refugees and reinforcing the health facilities of Mbera camp.

Social Safety Nets - TEKAVOUL
March 2020 – September 2025
$45m incl. $18m from RSW
Objective : Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the nationwide adaptive social safety net system and its coverage of poor and vulnerable households with targeted social transfers, including in refugee and host communities.

Decentralization and productive intermediate cities - MOUDOUN
March 2020 – May 2025
$66m incl. $20m from RSW
Objective : Improve access to local services in selected localities (including Mbera camp), electrify the camp and strengthen the capacities of Local Governments to plan and manage local public services.

BMZ/GIZ (German Development Cooperation):

Support to UNHCR in facilitating the operationalization of the Global Refugee Compact in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (SUN Global Programme)
January 2021 – December 2024
€9.8m

Objective: Build capacity to promote the socio-economic inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable members of host communities in Mauritania. This project builds on the commitments made by the Mauritanian government during the Global Refugee Forum relating to the development of a legal framework, access to documentation and the inclusion of refugees in national protection systems as well as access to the labour market. The project also aims at complementing the projects supported through the World Bank's IDA18 Refugee Sub-Window.

These investments and the increased involvement of development actors require support in the transition period towards inclusion in national systems.

European Union: NDICI Global-Europe, MFF 2021 – 2027

Durable solutions for forcibly displaced in Sub-Saharan Africa
Indimaj Project
January 2023 – December 2024
€1.8m
Objective : Strengthen protection and socio- economic inclusion for populations displaced by instability in Mali and support social cohesion between host and refugee communities in Mauritania.

Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA):

Tamasuk – Supporting resilience, social cohesion and inclusion of populations facing climate change and forced displacement in Mauritania
March 2024 – December 2026
$4m
Objective: Providing a comprehensive response at the nexus, through emergency preparedness and protection activities, community driven development projects as well as livelihoods and community activities while fostering peaceful coexistence.

Sheika Fatima Fund for Refugee Women

Providing health care to refugees and host communities through telehealth interventions.
December 2023 – July 2025
$150,000
Objective: Ensure refugees and host communities have access to quality specialist care via telemedicine from Mbera camp..