

MAURITANIA

June 2020

UNHCR provides protection and assistance to some **61,000 Malian refugees** in the arid south-east region where Mbera refugee camp is located, and to some **4,200 urban refugees and asylum-seekers** in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

The security situation in Mali is still volatile and **largescale returns are not expected**. Malians continue to arrive in Mauritania as part of **mixed population flows**. UNHCR is **engaging with development actors** to gradually move away from the traditional

care and maintenance approach as stipulated in Global Compact for Refugees. Committed to stay and deliver, UNHCR continues providing life-saving assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers by adjusting its programme under the COVID-19 crisis.

POPULATION OF CONCERN*

65,778

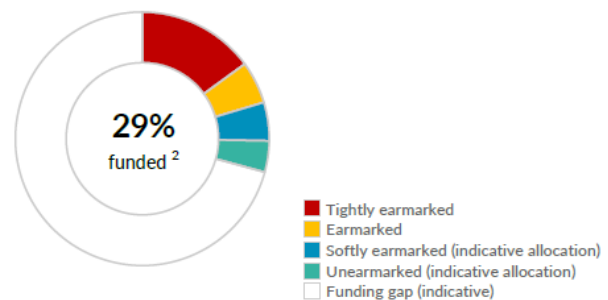


* Refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR (as of 31 May 2020)

FUNDING (AS OF 28 MAY)

USD 24.6 M

requested for the UNHCR operation in Mauritania,
7.1M received



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

52 National staff
19 International staff

Offices in Mauritania:

1 Branch office located in Nouakchott
1 Sub office in Bassikounou
1 Field unit in Nouadhibou



A UNHCR staff member delivering cash assistance for social protection to a refugee in Nouakchott in May 2020 ©Viola E Bruttomesso/UNHCR/2020

Working with Partners

- At the request of the Mauritanian Government, **UNHCR coordinates the humanitarian response for the Malian refugees in close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization, other line ministries and local authorities.**
- **UNHCR is a member of the 2018-2022 United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (CPDD)**, jointly signed with the Mauritanian Government, representatives of other United Nations agencies and international NGOs, which integrates humanitarian and development interventions. UNHCR participates in the United Nations Country Team, while national NGOs are also indispensable partners of UNHCR for the implementation of projects.

COVID-19 in Mauritania

- Under the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator and together with the UN sister agencies, UNHCR supports the **National Response Plan for the fight against COVID-19**. In the Hodh Chargui region, where Mbera camp is located, UNHCR is coordinating the interventions by humanitarian partners, in close coordination with the local authorities, based on the Refugee Coordination Model.
- The majority of refugees and asylum-seekers in Mauritania, already very vulnerable prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, were immediately impacted by the measures taken to stem the propagation of the virus and many lost their sources of income. Since the start of the pandemic, UNHCR Mauritania through its offices adapted and in fact enhanced its communication with refugees and asylum-seekers via various channels (phone, e-mail, social media, messaging applications) in an effort to support them as best as possible.

Main Activities

Protection

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR maintains and updates a refugee biometric registration database, provides tailored assistance to people with specific needs through home visits, psychosocial counselling, and support for people with disabilities.** It carries out awareness-raising activities, training and response to gender-based violence, as well as child protection. Malian refugees registered in Mbera are recognized as *prima facie* refugees. The authorities also register refugees in the Government biometric database. Furthermore, Mauritania has started issuing birth certificates to refugee children born in the country and ID cards to all Malian refugees in Mbera camp. In 2019, in coordination with the Government, UNHCR launched registration for Malian refugees residing outside Mbera camp, in the region of Hodh Echargui.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR carries out registration of asylum-seekers and determination of refugee status (RSD) within a context of mixed population movements.** Since June 2019, the out-of-camp registration of Malian refugees was extended to Nouakchott and, in the upcoming months, it will also be carried out in the coastal city of Nouadhibou. UNHCR organizes refugee protection trainings for Government officials, including police and military officers, and is advocating for the adoption of a national asylum law.
- Reinforcement of **communication with the community** to prevent the propagation of the COVID-19 has been UNHCR's key priority. Trained refugee community mobilisers were among the first to start building networks for awareness raising on preventive measures including social distancing and hand washing both in Mbera camp and host communities, urban areas, and key border points. In collaboration with partners and local authorities, UNHCR distributed more than 15,000 awareness-raising posters and leaflets in the Hodh Chargui region.

Cash Based Intervention

In 2020, in line with the UNHCR Global Policy, UNHCR Mauritania continues reinforcing its cash-based intervention both in Mbera and urban areas. In April, 623 refugees with specific needs have received cash assistance to satisfy basic needs during the general monthly distribution in Mbera camp.

Rapid needs assessments by UNHCR in urban areas revealed that **86 per cent of POCs were severely affected** by the COVID-19 measures (closures of schools and non-essential businesses, and limitation on movements), including through loss of jobs and income, inability to meet most basic needs (water, food, shelter), or being at risk of eviction. To mitigate the immediate shock from the loss of income, **UNHCR distributed one-off cash assistance for social protection to 1,028 households** (2,478 individuals, around sixty percent of the total population). The distribution has been tremendously appreciated by the beneficiaries.

Education

- **In Mbera camp**, there are some 20,000 children of school age. **UNHCR supports primary education with the payment of salaries for school staff, the maintenance of school infrastructure and awareness-raising activities to promote education for all.** UNHCR also offers literacy and numeracy classes for approximately 200 adults.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR supports access to primary and secondary education for more than 500 refugee children through 'cash for education'.** In addition, the DAFI scholarship provided by the Government of Germany enables more than **100 refugee students to pursue tertiary education.**
- **Following the prolonged closure of schools due to COVID-19**, UNHCR is actively supporting **distance learning** in Mbera camp. UNHCR conducted training for trainers on distance education at primary and secondary level in Mbera camp. Some students have been able to resume their studies, using the techniques shared in the training such as the use of the WhatsApp platform and through local radio. In addition to this, to support distance learning UNHCR in an environment with limited access to ICT infrastructure SUCH AS Mbera Camp, UNHCR distributed almost 700 school manuals to children from 4th to 6th grade.

Health

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR supports referral to the second and tertiary health.** Medical evacuations to Nema and Kiffa hospitals are provided to both refugee and host community members with serious medical conditions, when treatment is unavailable in Mbera camp or Bassikounou. A gradual transition is underway for the inclusion of refugees in the national health system.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR facilitates access to the primary national healthcare system for all refugees and vulnerable asylum-seekers**, as well as secondary and tertiary and emergency healthcare if needed.
- **In line with its commitment during the Global Refugee Forum to include refugees in the national health system**, the Government of Mauritania has consistently included refugees in its preparedness and response for the COVID-19. At the request of the Government, UNHCR has delivered eight Refugee Housing Units to be used as confinement units, six to the main points of entry for refugees from Mali (Doueinkara-Fassala, Adel Bagrou and Gogui) and two to the health center in Bassikounou. This is in addition to fifty shelters for quarantine delivered at Doueinkara-Fassala. In April, UNHCR made available two ambulances at Bassikounou and Nema for COVID-19 interventions. At the request of the local authority, hundreds of samples of suspect COVID-19 cases have been transported from the Hodh Chargui region to Nouakchott for testing. Procurement of large quantities of hygiene and protection kits is ongoing.

Food Security and Nutrition

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR facilitates monthly food and cash distributions provided by the World Food Programme (WFP).** Due to limited financial resources, as well as in view of the future inclusion of refugees into national social safety nets, an exercise to identify refugees who can be gradually weaned off food assistance is taking place since 2019. As a result, 2,623 out of close to 13,000 households had seen their assistance discontinued or reduced. Considering the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, the reduction of the food assistance for the less vulnerable groups has been postponed.
- **In urban areas, refugees living with specific needs receives a multi-purpose cash** assistance to cover their nutritional and other basic needs.
- **UNHCR, with WFP, and NGO partners, are adjusting the monthly food distribution at Mbera camp** to avoid large gatherings. Medical screening is mandatory before entering the distribution sites. Trained community mobilisers are raising awareness on social distancing during the distribution process.

Water and Sanitation

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR ensures maintenance and optimization of the existing water system**, construction and rehabilitation of semi-permanent latrines and the collection, transport and treatment of solid waste. UNHCR supports hygiene awareness-raising activities to prevent the spread of water-borne diseases.

Shelter and Core Relief Items (CRIs)

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR will support the construction of semi-permanent shelters with adequate sheet roofs and walls to protect the most vulnerable refugees from sand, giving them privacy and dignity as they adjust to their life in exile.** The modality will be either cash grants or in-kind, depending on their capacity to build houses. UNHCR ensures the replacement of CRIs (jerry cans, mosquito nets) and distribution of shelters as well as **the maintenance of infrastructure and roads.** UNHCR also ensures the distribution of hygiene kits for all refugees, with specific sanitary hygiene kits for women of childbearing age.

Peaceful Coexistence and Self-Reliance

- **In line with the Global Compact on Refugees** that encourages states and stakeholders to foster inclusive economic growth for refugees and host communities, **UNHCR and its partners are undertaking a number of activities aimed at improving livelihoods of refugees in Mbera camp, as well as in the host communities.** These include income-generating activities, cultivation of market gardens and on-the-job training benefitting young women and men from the both, refugee and host communities.
- **UNHCR supports community-based initiatives, such as committees composed of representatives from the refugee and host communities and promotes peaceful coexistence with socio-cultural and focus groups activities.** UNHCR also supports projects targeting the host population around Mbera camp, which include interventions to improve access to water and livestock activities.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR facilitates access to micro-credit schemes and promotes certified vocational training.**

Durable Solutions

- **UNHCR facilitates the voluntary repatriation of refugees willing to go back to their country of origin, following counselling on conditions in the areas of return.** In line with the agreement signed by UNHCR, Mali and Mauritania, UNHCR also facilitates the implementation of a tripartite framework on voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees. However, given the situation in Mali, it is unlikely that largescale returns will take place in the near future.
- **UNHCR promotes resettlement as a protection tool for the most vulnerable cases.**

Special thanks to our donors who have provided earmarked funds for the operation in Mauritania:

[Canada](#) | [CERF](#) | [European Union](#) | [Italy](#) | [Japan](#) | [Monaco](#) | [USA](#)

Special thanks to the major donors who have provided softly earmarked funds

[Germany](#) | [Finland](#) | [Sweden](#) | [Private donors](#)

Thanks to other donors who have provided unearmarked funds

[Sweden](#) | [Norway](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [Denmark](#) | [United Kingdom](#) | [Germany](#) | [Switzerland](#)

CONTACTS

Umi Kojima, Associate External Relations Officer, OBAYASHI@unhcr.org

Viola E. Bruttomesso, Associate Public Information Officer, BRUTTOME@unhcr.org

[UNHCR operation page - Facebook](#) - [Stories](#)