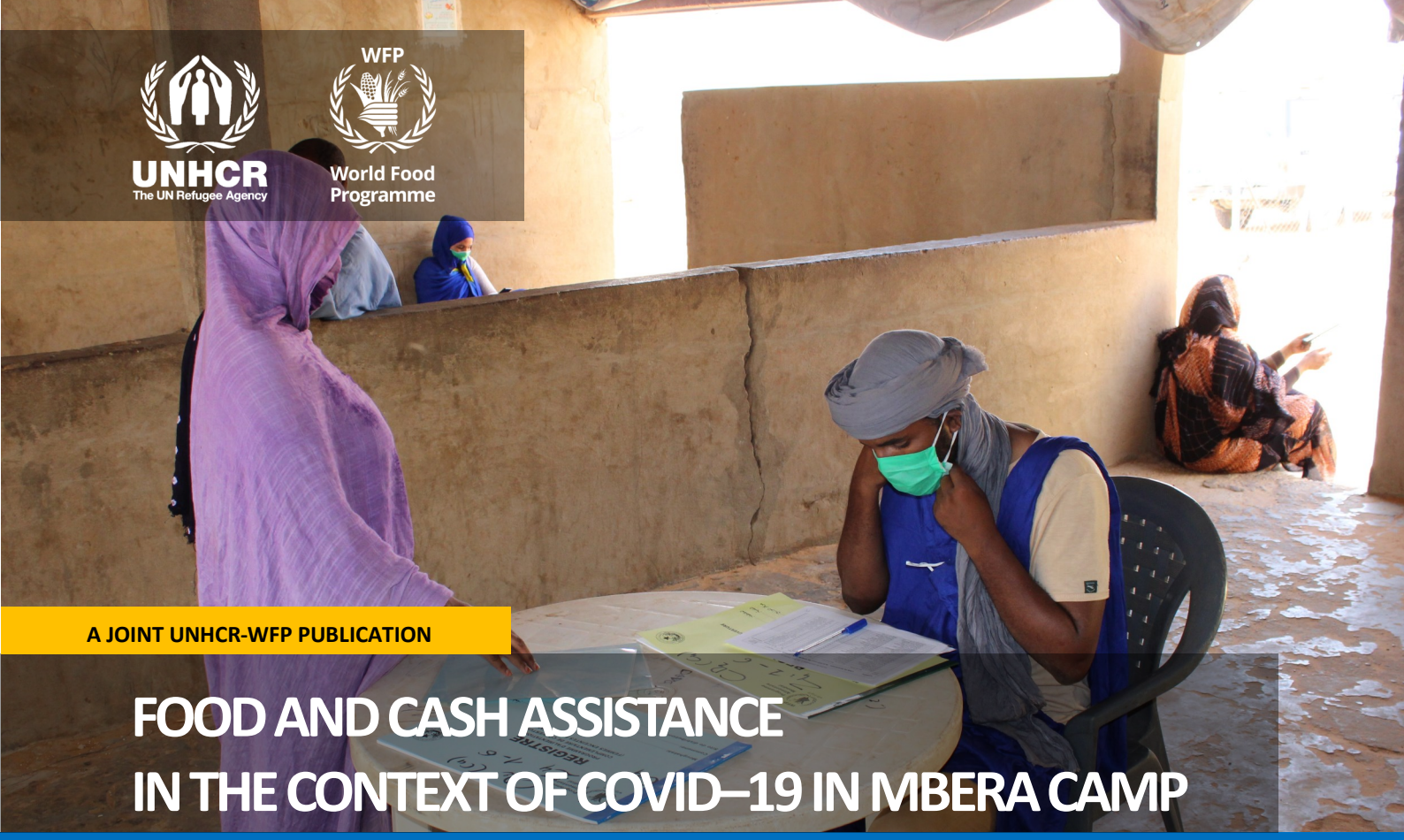


UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

WFP
World Food Programme

A JOINT UNHCR-WFP PUBLICATION

FOOD AND CASH ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID–19 IN MBERA CAMP

UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) work together both during emergencies and longer-term crises to provide food and cash assistance to displaced people around the world, especially vulnerable groups such as women and children. Through the timely provision of the right quantity and the right kinds of assistance, UNHCR and WFP seek to restore and maintain access to a sound diet as well as prevent and tackle malnutrition.

In Mbera camp, the two agencies work together since the establishment of the camp in 2012, and this continues amidst the current health crisis.

CONTEXT

Starting in 2018, in light of the agreed strategy aimed at promoting self-reliance, WFP and UNHCR re-oriented their strategy towards targeted rather than blanket assistance, which meant that following a process of identifying the most vulnerable refugees, those less vulnerable would gradually see their food assistance reduced or stopped. Meanwhile, refugees would be supported with livelihoods activities to earn some income that would offset the reductions in food assistance. The rollout of targeted assistance started early 2019 with the complete or partial withdrawal of unconditional assistance to 2,623 households. The process was suspended in 2020 due to the health crisis.

Further to the COVID-19 outbreak in March, strict measures such as movement restrictions and market closures (including the Mbera camp market) resulted in a significant slowdown in livelihoods activities, threatening the self-sustainability of refugees and food security in the camp. Overall food insecurity prevalence had already risen from 30 percent to 36 percent in the camp during the early phase of the crisis (between December 2019 and April 2020)[1], further weakening already vulnerable households.

Moreover, a rapid survey[2] assessing the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic situation of the refugees in Mbera camp has shown that 58 percent of households were worried about not having food and were unable to access food products due to rising prices and shortages of products, closing shops or lack of means. The study confirmed a significant need for the continuation of the general food distribution as 75 percent of those interviewed stated that their economic situation was negatively impacted by the COVID-19, and that 83 percent had to spend their savings to cope with the situation during the past 30 days. These figures further highlight the urgency and need for continued and adequate assistance.

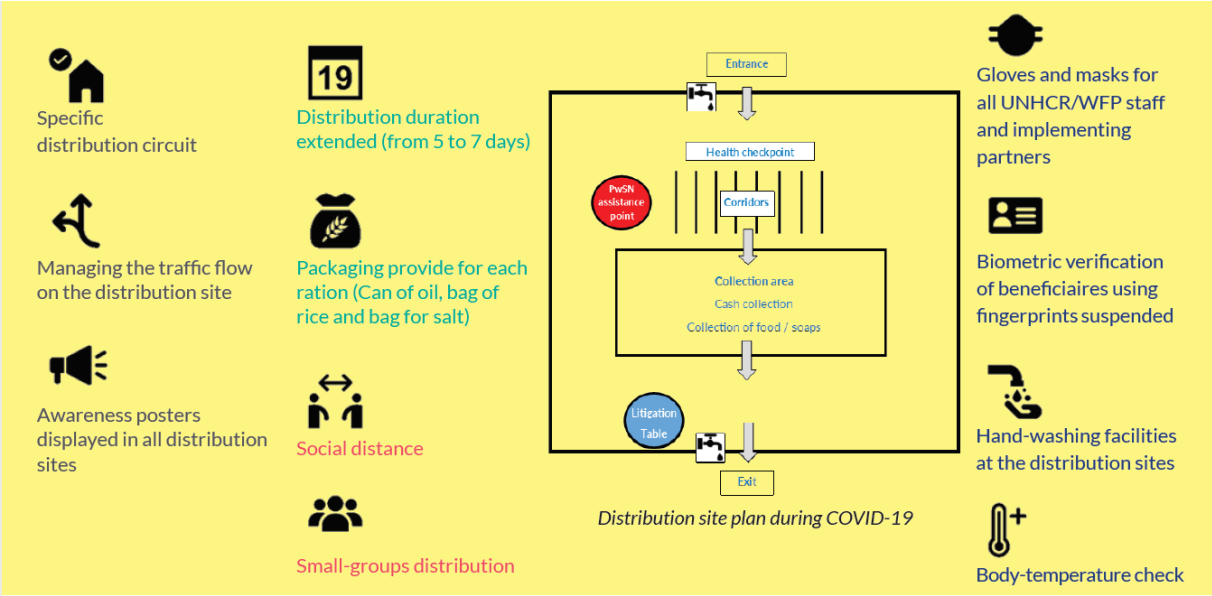
1 Post Distribution Monitoring survey, April 2020

2 UNHCR Mauritania, Results of a rapid survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic and protection situation of refugees in the Mbera refugee camp, July 2020

In response, WFP and UNHCR exceptionally expanded in-kind food assistance during the May-June cycle to groups that had previously been removed from the distribution lists (groups 4 to 6). This could not be renewed due to funding limitations and, in fact, the two agencies had no choice but to operate a preventive reduction of the cash component of the ration starting from July to mitigate the risk of a full interruption of cash transfers later in the year. The cash component was reduced from 450MRU to 250MRU per person and per month.

ADAPTING DISTRIBUTIONS OF FOOD AND CASH ASSISTANCE TO THE COVID-19

The Mbera camp partners had to devise new methods for distributing assistance, to minimize the risk of contagion.



HOW WERE THE REFUGEES ASSISTED IN JULY AND AUGUST?

57,729 refugees benefited from food and/or cash assistance

UNHCR and WFP reverted to providing both components of the hybrid ration (food and cash) to the most food insecure households (groups 1, 2 and 3), while group 4 (fragile) received cash only. Groups 5 and 6 (catalyst/ emergent) did not receive any unconditional assistance during this round.

FUNDING NEEDS

Given the deteriorating conditions in the camp in the context of the COVID crisis:

- WFP is urgently seeking **USD 2 million** to cover cash transfer requirements **November and December 2020**. For the **first quarter of 2021**, **USD 4 million** is required to cover food and cash requirements. Should WFP fail to secure these funds, the cash component of the ration will be fully suspended from November and the food component from January. This would have dramatic consequences for food insecure households who are further weakened by the restrictive measures set in place to contain the propagation of the virus.

- UNHCR's total needs are **USD 2.2 million**, out which USD 1,2 million for cash-based interventions, USD 100,000 for WASH, and USD 150,000 for the Camp Management and Coordination.