Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

August 2023

61,248 refugees live in Mahama refugee camp located in Kirehe District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

The 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.

Around **51 per cent** of the camp's population is younger than 18 years old.

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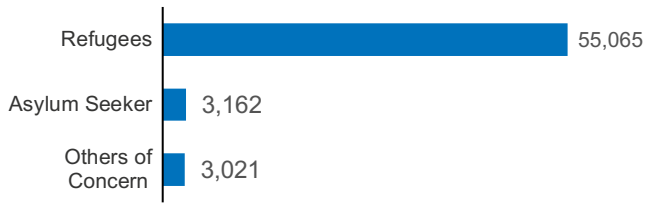

UNHCR STAFF BASED IN KIREHE SUB-OFFICE COVER THE NEEDS OF REFUGEES IN MAHAMA REFUGEE CAMP

From 8 to 10 August, UNHCR in collaboration with livelihood partners, MINEMA and the refugee market committee organized exhibition of livelihood activities while mobilizing community to strive for self-reliance.

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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 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, Maison Shalom, Red Cross Rwanda, Pro-Femmes/ Twese Hamwe, Indego Africa, GIZ, Practical Action and Umutanguha Microfinance provide support to refugees in the camp 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. On 29 August, the Protection Coordination meeting was held and chaired by UNHCR and co-chaired by MINEMA with all the protection partners.
- UNHCR operates a protection desk 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 desk enquire about resettlement opportunities, health services, request changes to their family composition (registering of births, deaths and marriages), and report protection concerns. In August, UNHCR received 53 refugee cases at the protection desk, 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 complaint boxes, protection hotline, protection email, and the protection desk in Mahama refugee camp. In August, 34 cases were received on the hotline, they were related to health, protection, and shelter, and targeted assistance. UNHCR and its partners followed-up on these cases. 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 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 government, the National Commission for Children (NCC), MINEMA and DGIE. 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.
- For child protection, best interest assessments (BIAs) and BIDs 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. UNHCR and partners also conduct meetings with unaccompanied and separated children to discuss and address issues that affect them.
- 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.
- From 28 to 30 August SCI jointly with UNHCR conducted a workshop on child protection mainstreaming in all sectors in the camp and in the host community. The Vice Mayor of Kirehe in charge of Social Affairs officially opened the workshop. Participants included government officials from the Kirehe district and partners working in different sectors in the camp.
- From 28 to 30 August SCI conducted training for 33 partners' and government staff on child protection programs and children's rights, while throughout the month of August 6,676 refugees were also trained on child protection programs and rights.
- 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 communities, 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. During this month, the Ideas box has supported 2,308 persons, including 319 children with disabilities and 543 older persons. Among them, 464 people participated in games, 519 people attended the library, 556 people watched the cinema, 769 people took part in multimedia actvities.
- On 31 August, UNHCR participated in the awareness raising campaign named "FREE INDEED" organized by a refugee religious leaders aimed at sensitizing the refugee community about the rights of children, prevention of early pregnancies and fight against drug abuse among youth and families.
- 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 further assistance.

- In August 2023, 71 individuals were deactivated in UNHCR's proGres database for several reasons including resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and death, while 14 were reactivated after being cleared by the continuous registration panel (CRP). 170 new-born babies were registered while individuals who turned five years old were biometrically enrolled in the UNHCR's database. 248 new proof of registration documents were re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition. The Government authorities also issued 127 ID cards to refugees in the camp.
- In August, UNHCR registered 1,972 asylum seekers from DRC some of whom were recently relocated to Mahama Camp and others who have been accommodated in Mahama since the start of the influx in November 2022.
- From 8 to 28 August, UNHCR in partnership with the Catholic Church in Rwanda organized a "Youth, let's promote good behaviors wherever we are" campaign. By engaging young people into sports tournaments in football, basketball, volleyball, and seat-ball, it occupied them during school summer holidays to prevent them from partaking in negative coping mechanisms. In August, RWEMA Football Academy (RWEMAFA) started its cooperation with SCI in Mahama camp to promote football talent among children aged between 12 to 17 years old.

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. In total 12,534 refugee children (6,156 male and 5,933 female) are enrolled in primary school with 95 per cent attendance rates, while 4,598 (2484 male and 2,114 female) are enrolled in secondary school. In August, the school remained closed due to holidays.
- In addition, 4,607 (2,306 male and 2,301 female) children aged between 3 to 5 years old are enrolled in Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centres in the camp.
- 899 refugee students from Mahama refugee camp are enrolled in secondary boarding schools across the country under different scholarships operated by UNHCR and partners, namely ADRA, Maison Shalom, Agahozo Shalom Youth Village, Impact Hope, EduFamme, and other students who are privately sponsored by their families.
- UNHCR supports university students to apply for scholarships through the Elite centre managed by Maison Shalom and the Ideas Box centre managed by Humanity & Inclusion where they access tablets, computers and connect to the internet to apply for tertiary education opportunities.
- 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 was fully transferred to the Government of Rwanda in June 2023 whereby WFP directly supports the Government to subsidize 90 percent of the cost of refugee school meals. UNHCR has also 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.

- Due to lack of facilities, no science combinations are currently being offered at the schools near the camps. In addition, the ECD centre comprising of 10 classrooms is not operational due to lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities. To address the challenge of inadequate classrooms, UNHCR has completed construction of 8 classrooms and construction of 28 more classrooms in Mahama camp is ongoing, with 54 per cent of the construction completed as of August.
- The children of new asylum seekers from DRC hosted in Mahama refugee camp were enrolled in curriculum orientation programmes held at Paysannat L school to get them up to speed during the school holidays ahead of integrating them in the national education system when the new academic year starts in September. 1,478 Congolese asylum seekers (770 primary and 708 secondary school students) were enrolled in a holiday orientation program. The attendance was 85 per cent. UNHCR and partners continue to support children to go to school.
- On 14 August, UNHCR and Pro-Femmes / Twese Hamwe /Edufemme project met with village leaders in charge of education to discuss school absenteeism of the refugee children. The meeting concluded with a task to the team to visit the children in their community and find the root causes, while motivating them to attend school.
- From 29 to 31 August, UNHCR and its education partners (WVI, Pro-Femmes / Twese Hamwe , Maison Shalom and SCI) supported school clubs to organize a back to school campaign in the camp and host community. The activities included matching, educative sketch, dance, interactive questions with awards, and speeches. Approximately 48,980 people participated.

Health and Nutrition

- Refugees have access to primary health care services from two health centres in Mahama camp. Where additional treatment is needed, UNHCR facilitates and covers the costs of referrals to secondary and tertiary health care outside the camp. In August, 9,767 primary health care consultations took place in the camp, including 291 patients referred to secondary and tertiary health care levels. This also included the delivery of 151 new-born babies during the month.
- Mahama II health centre was also inaugurated as a medicalized health centre in 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 in the coming months. 99 per cent of deliveries are addressed by skilled health workers.
- Primary health care services provided in Mahama camp health centres in cooperation with SCI include outpatient consultations, immunization for children under 5 years old and pregnant women, reproductive healthcare, and 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.
- 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. In August, SCI conducted 42 health education sessions for the newly arrived Congolese asylum seekers on disease prevention and control, reproductive health, nutrition and other health-related topics which reached 1,123 participants.
- UNHCR and partners provide regular nutrition support and assistance to refugees in Rwanda. Currently, 14 severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 90 moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) cases are being assisted as part of the nutrition programme in Mahama refugee camp.

- From 14 to 18 August, SCI conducted a measles-rubella vaccination campaign, through which 1,514 children aged 9 months to 15 years were vaccinated in the camp.

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. Since February 2023, the cash assistance has been increased, whereby 84 per cent of the population classified as highly vulnerable receive the full amount of RWF 10,000 (an increase from RWF 7,000 per month), while 7.1 per cent who are classified as moderately vulnerable receive RWF 5,000 (increased from RWF 3,500).
- Through the support of WFP, Congolese asylum seekers hosted at the departure centre in Mahama who are pending formal registration, receive hot meals twice per day in lieu of having bank accounts where they can receive cash assistance. In addition, vulnerable refugees including children under 5 years, expectant and breastfeeding mothers, the elderly and those with several chronical illness are provided with supplementary feeding.

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.
- The average water supplied on daily basis to Mahama refugee camp was 1,283.1 m^3 resulting in 22 litres per person per day for refugees, the average of 161.1 m^3 was also supplied daily to the host community. In August, UNHCR carried out operational and maintenance of the water treatment plant and the water supply system in the camp alongside partners.
- Mahama camp has 3,398 operational stances of communal latrines which also include showers. This equates to 17.1 persons per drop hole/ per shower room (against the standard of 20 persons). 1,006 durable hand washing stands to promote hygiene practices and 125 laundry slabs were previously constructed in the camp and UNHCR conducts regular maintenance to keep them operational. Three trucks to dislodge latrines and two garbage collection trucks are available to carry waste from the camp to the nearby dumping site. In August, 564 m^3 of sludges from 82 blocks of latrines and 336 m^3 of garbage from 12 refuse pits garbage collection sites were collected and removed from the camp.
- Hygiene promotion activities are conducted through community hygiene clubs and the Community Based Environmental and Hygiene Promotion Program model which empowers the community to adopt good practices. In August, UNHCR in partnership with WVI distributed 220 litres of liquid soap to public places including markets, camp entrances, gas distribution site, registration centre and departure centre.

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 families). UNHCR supports refugee households to keep their shelter in good condition. In August, 20 shelters were rehabilitated with new roof, doors, and windows.
- Due to continued influx of new arrivals from DRC to Rwanda, UNHCR continues to conduct shelter mapping exercises to identify vacant shelters which can accommodate the additional asylum seekers. In August, UNHCR allocated shelters to 637 asylum seekers from DRC in Mahama refugee camp.
- On a quarterly 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. The amount of assistance distributed

varies depending on what kind of items are targeted for the quarter. Due to the lack of funds, the distribution of cash assistance for NFIs is now on pause.

- The distribution of NFIs in-kind and food in-kind for refugees and asylum seekers transferred from urban areas to Mahama camp as well as to newly arrived Congolese asylum seekers from other camps continued in August. In August, 1,140 households of 3,574 individuals were assisted with food in-kind for different durations. 3,113 individuals received hot meals at the departure centre waiting for registration, shelter allocation and other assistance.
- In addition, UNHCR distributed 442 kitchen sets to 942 (388 for Congolese asylum seekers and 54 for refugees transferred from urban areas). Blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans and cooking pots were also distributed to Congolese asylum seekers and refugees transferred from urban areas to help them settle into their new environment.

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 14,953 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. In August, 83 336 kg LPG was distributed among refugees and asylum seekers; 2,870 kg LPG was provided at the departure centre to cook hot meals for the asylum seekers from the DRC; and 637 gas cylinders with accessories were distributed to Congolese asylum seekers.
- To support the productive use of energy in Mahama camp, Practical Action runs a Renewable Energy for Refugees programme. Phase II of the programme was launched in late 2022 and has so far identified entrepreneurs and 100 businesses in Mahama II and the local host community who will benefit from solarization of their energy sources.
- Under the productive use of energy scheme, Practical Action has constructed footings to install 531 standalone solar streetlights.
- Practical Action has trained two farmers' cooperatives which include refugees and host community on regenerative and soil conservation as well as organic pesticide preparation.
- Refugee volunteers also support, as part of an environment project operated by WVI, in improving the environment of Mahama camp. They are responsible for watering and planting trees throughout the camp.
- 70,000 plastic bags filled with soil and manure and semi-direct tree seedlings were prepared for future tree planting by the Rwandan Red Cross (RRC) in August. UNHCR, WVI and RRC also conducted community mobilization on environment management and protection of planted trees in the camp.
- In August 2023, in partnership with WVI, an average of 16,136 people were reached during the environmental protection promotion activities through community work and household visits. 36 bamboo trees were planted at Akagera River buffer zone to protect the river from soil erosion effects and seedling preparation for 364 bamboos trees was conducted in the nursery beds.

Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion

- There are three markets in Mahama refugee camp, and refugees can also access a larger market located outside the camp with businesses run by both refugees and Rwandans. Many refugees operate small businesses at the markets providing income to support their families and increasing their self-reliance.
- Indego Africa provides entrepreneurship trainings and mentorship to women artisans in Mahama camp. Many of the handcraft products are subsequently sold to local and international markets such as UNHCR's Made51 scheme. From 8 to 10 August, UNHCR in collaboration with livelihood

partners, MINEMA and the refugee market committee organized an exhibition of livelihood activities while mobilizing community to strive for self-reliance.

- In Mahama refugee camp, UNHCR runs a livelihood project in partnership with Caritas Rwanda to support refugees graduate from poverty. In August, 24 refugees and Rwandans received a cash instalment of RWF 10,524,800 to support them establish small businesses, while 229 existing and 690 new businesses received the first instalment of their grant. Caritas Rwanda also provided financial support of RWF 1,362,000 to 108 households of 189 individuals.
- In August, 812 individuals received loans and 53 individuals received financial education training provided by Umutanguha. In addition, Umutanguha trained four village saving groups made up of young mothers on saving methodologies.
- Fifty women received 60 percent of cash grant consisting of RWF 7,572,360 from the Rwandan Red Cross to start business in August. The remaining 40 per cent (RWF 5,048,240) will be provided in September.
- In August, ALIGHT enrolled three individuals in a driving school to acquire skills to obtain driving license and offered business advisory services to 32 refugees.
- During the month, Practical Action continued supporting the production of fertilizers (composts and liquid fertilizers) to be used in the 2023 C season and in the 2024 A season by different joint refugee and Rwandan cooperatives.
- In addition, in August, Inkomoko trained 1,900 business owners in business management (309 in bookkeeping, 516 in sales, and 319 inventory management), 404 in market linkage, and 362 refugees participated in finance training.

Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,382 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from Mahama refugee camp. In August, no voluntary repatriations were facilitated.
- In August, UNHCR submitted 57 cases consisting of 210 refugees for resettlement to the USA. A total of 64 refugees departed to various resettlement countries with 8 individuals to Australia, 3 to Canada, 18 to Norway, and 35 to the USA.