

# Mahama Refugee Camp, Rwanda

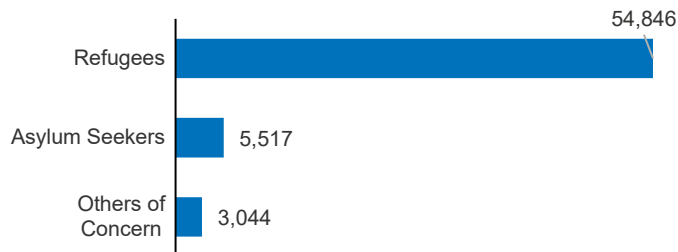
November 2023

**54,846** refugees, **5,517** asylum seekers and **3,044** others of Concern (children born of a refugee and Rwandan national) live in Mahama refugee camp located in Kirehe District in the Eastern Province of Rwanda.

Mahama refugee 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.

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

## POPULATION OF CONCERN



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



*MINEMA, UNHCR and Practical Action inaugurated a new solar-powered water irrigation system in Mahama refugee camp on November 16.*

## CONTACTS

**Farhat Jabeen Khan**, Head of Sub Office, Kirehe,

[jabeen@unhcr.org](mailto:jabeen@unhcr.org), Cell +250 788 382280

# 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 consists of 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, Alight, Maison Shalom, Red Cross Rwanda, Pro-Femmes/ Twese Hamwe, Indego Africa, GIZ, Practical Action and Umutanguha Microfinance provide support to refugees in the camp primarily 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 27 November, the Protection Coordination meeting was held and co-chaired by UNHCR and MINEMA with all the protection partners.
- UNHCR operates two protection desks 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 desks enquire about resettlement opportunities, health services, request changes to their family composition (registering of births, deaths, and marriages), and report protection concerns. In November, UNHCR received 45 refugee cases at the protection desks, 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 a protection hotline, protection email, and the protection desks in Mahama refugee camp. 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 BID 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. 11 Children have been reunified with their parents from Mahama camp (in-country reunifications). UNHCR and partners also conduct meetings with unaccompanied and separated children to discuss and address issues that affect them. During the November, 49 BIAs and 14 BIDs for resettlement consideration were conducted while 01 BIA and 02 notes for the file (NFF) were completed for identified children with protection concerns.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 November 2023, 291 individuals were deactivated in UNHCR's proGres database for several reasons including resettlement, voluntary repatriation, and death, while 07 were reactivated after being cleared by the continuous registration panel (CRP). 163 new-born babies were registered while individuals who turned 5 years old were biometrically enrolled in the UNHCR's database. 635 new proof of registration documents were re-issued to refugees due to damage and changes in family composition.
- On 01 November 1,242 Congolese A/S from Nkamira were transferred from Nkamira Transit Centre to Mahama refugee camp. Upon arrival in the camp, UNHCR and partners provided them with accommodation and hot meals, while those with specific needs (sick, PWD and UASC) were supported accordingly.

## 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.
- UNHCR regularly supports the enrolment and attendance of refugees and asylum seekers in the Paysannat L. In collaboration with WVI and the school management, UNHCR continues to monitor learning and teaching of refugee students at the school. In November, the average attendance was 97%.
- 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 Mahama camp. 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 77 per cent of the construction completed as of November.

## 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 November, upper respiratory tract infections was primary illness attended to at 23.5% (188 cases).
- 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.
- UNHCR provides primary health care services in Mahama camp health centres in cooperation with SCI. Healthcare services available 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.

### 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 based on UNHCR data. Since October 2023, the cash assistance has been reduced whereby 73.75 per cent of the population classified as highly vulnerable receive RWF 8,500 and 7.39 per cent who are classified as moderately vulnerable receive RWF 4,200.
- 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 chronic illness are provided with supplementary feeding. In November, 696 Individuals were assisted with hot meals at the departure center.

### 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.
- An average of 1,349 m<sup>3</sup> of water is supplied daily of which 1,237.1m<sup>3</sup> is distributed to refugees in the camp at an average of 20.2 l per person per day and 88.7 m<sup>3</sup> distributed to the host community. In November, 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 blocks of communal latrines that also include showers. This equates to 18.3 persons per drop hole/ per shower room (against the standard of 20 persons).
- Hygiene promotion activities are conducted through community hygiene clubs in Mahama camp. UNHCR and partners also ensure the implementation of the national Community Based Environmental and Hygiene Promotion Program model which empowers the community to adopt good practices. In November, UNHCR in partnership with WVI distributed 440 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 average-size families). UNHCR supports refugee households to keep their shelter in good condition. In November, 05 shelters were rehabilitated with new roof, doors, and windows.
- 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 November. As a result, 393 households of 922 individuals of new Congolese asylum seekers were assisted with food in-kind for 30 days.
- In November, 439 households of 1,016 individuals received kitchen sets, including 420 households (979 individuals) of Congolese asylum seekers, and 19 households (37 individuals) who moved from urban areas to Mahama camp. 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 15,520 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.
- 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 so far, Practical Action's contracted companies have sold 163 improved cooking stoves and 1,345kg of clean cooking pellets in both sides (camp & host community) for contributing to the climate change mitigation and support as back up to LPG use.
- Refugee volunteers under supervision of UNHCR operational partner Rwanda Red Cross also supported in planting 22,000 different trees species (including 1,200 fruit trees) both inside the camp and in the host community as part of an environment project, in improving the environment of Mahama camp. They are responsible for watering and planting trees throughout the camp.
- In November, in partnership with WVI, an average of 16,263 people were reached during the environmental protection promotion activities through community work and household visits. Moreover, refugee casual workers, in collaboration with WVI, planted 67 bamboos and 8,677 Senna spectabilis trees were planted in the camp and along Akagera River buffer zone to protect the river from soil erosion effects.

### 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.
- In November, 50 first younger mothers were trained on financial education and 25 were trained on tailoring reusable diapers and babs by ALIGHT.

### Durable Solutions

- Since May 2020, 29,382 Burundian refugees have been voluntarily repatriated home from Mahama refugee camp. In November, no voluntary repatriations were facilitated.
- In November, UNHCR submitted 26 cases of 94 refugees for resettlement to countries such as USA and Canada. In total, 198 refugees departed to resettlement countries during the month, with 184 to USA while 14 were resettled to Canada.