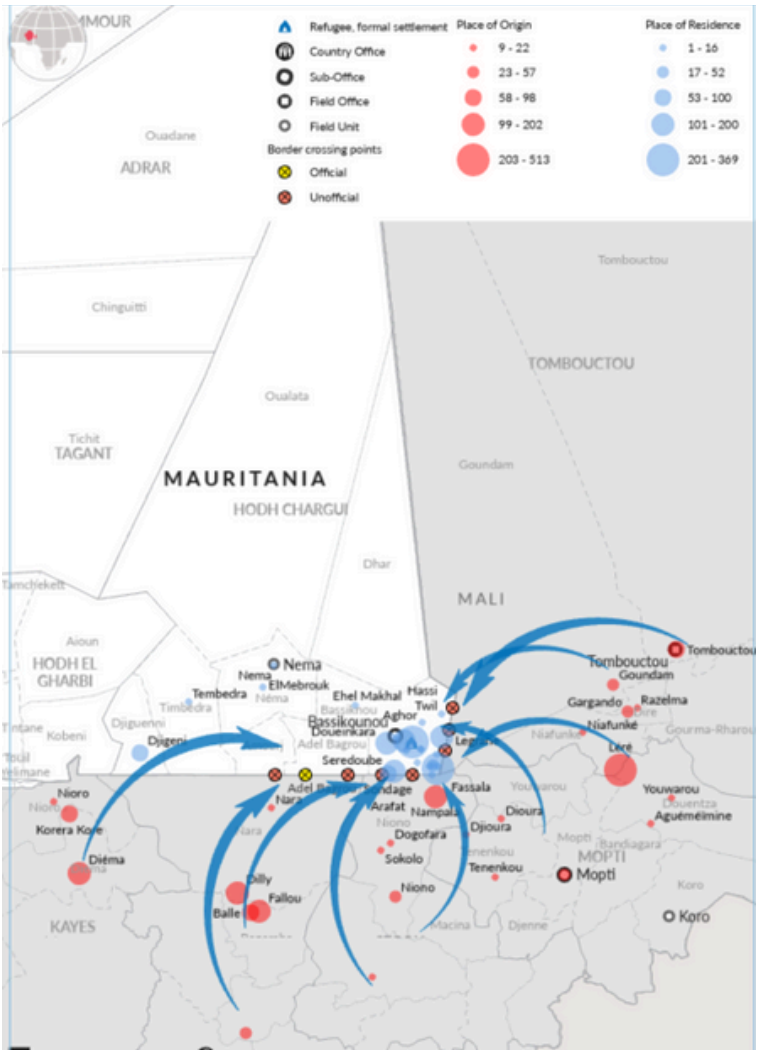
Refugee Influx Hodh Chargui - Mauritania

As of 16 December 2025

Overview

The security situation in central and northern Mali remains fragile and unpredictable, continuing to drive displacement toward Mauritania. In Léré, at least 20 reported executions have occurred since the onset of the blockade, including three in the past week, alongside systematic searches and severe movement restrictions. Fuel shortages have disrupted telecommunications, sharply limiting monitoring and information flows. In central Mali around Sofara and Djenné, insecurity persists and civilian movement along key roads remains high risk.

This week, UNHCR and partners identified 446 newly arrived refugees in Hodh Chargui, bringing the total number of people who have arrived since the start of the influx to 6,223. Women and children once again constitute the majority of new arrivals. Protection needs remain acute. 12% of children are unaccompanied or separated reflecting fragmented flight strategies in which families prioritize the movement of their children and most vulnerable families. However, the insecurity on the flight paths causes protection risks. 4% of refugees report gender-based violence. As needs increase, protection services, and assistance in terms shelter, core relief items, and food are increasingly overstretched underscoring the urgent need for additional and flexible support to sustain the response.



Key figures

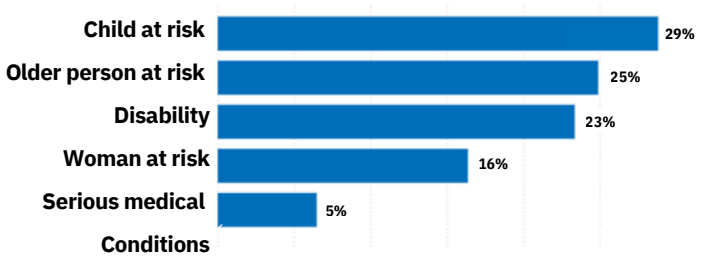
6,223
Refugees arrived since 24th October

19%
Adult women

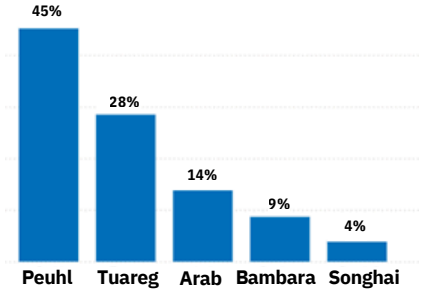
68%
Children

Estimated daily refugee arrivals

Vulnerabilities



Ethnicity



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© UNHCR/Bertrand Hamassi Diabe – Refugee families gather around a UNHCR tent as they organize essential household items during a relief distribution by UNHCR and partners in Djigueni, Mauritania.

The security situation in Mali remains fragile, with continued risks to civilians despite the absence of large-scale clashes during last week. In Léré, serious security incidents continue to be reported, most recently the execution of three young men who had previously been abducted, bringing the number of reported executions in Lere to around twenty since the onset of the blockade. The situation is further compounded by the disruption of telecommunications, as fuel shortages prevent the operation of communication infrastructure, significantly limiting remote monitoring and information flow.

The economic impact of the blockade remains severe. Trade between Timbuktu and Bamako is still disrupted and transport trucks are reportedly blocked. Along the river corridor, systematic searches continue, particularly targeting fuel and individuals perceived to be linked to state institutions, further restricting movement and livelihoods.

This week, UNHCR and partners identified 446 newly arrived refugees (86 families) in Hodh Chargui, bringing the cumulative total to 6,223 individuals (978 families) since the start of the influx. The profile of new arrivals remains consistent with previous weeks, with women and children continuing to constitute the majority of those crossing into Mauritania. Most newly identified refugees originate from Nampala in central Mali and have settled primarily in Sondage Teidouma and Seredouba, reflecting the continued use of informal routes.

© AP Photo/Caitlin Kelly – From an Associated Press report documenting the testimony of a Malian woman who fled violence.

An unnamed woman who fled violence in Mali told The Associated Press that panic overtook her as armed fighters approached her village. In the chaos, she ran without her three-month-old baby, leaving the child behind at home. Hours later, she returned and found her daughter lying in front of the house, her tiny hands clenched into fists.

"I was so scared, I forgot I had a baby,"
the woman said, clutching her daughter.

In parallel, 46 individuals (14 families) originating from the Léré area were able to enter Mauritania through the official border crossing at Doueinkara. Newly arrived refugees reported that they had left Léré prior to the imposition of the blockade and had been living for several weeks in villages approximately 30 kilometres from the border, hoping for the situation to improve so they could return to their homes. As security situation has not improved, families had no means to survive. Livelihoods have collapsed and access to basic services became increasingly limited. Families had no other choice than to flee to Mauritania. Most described travelling on foot for long distances, deliberately avoiding main roads and checkpoints due to fear of violence or extortion.

UNHCR and the National Agency for Population Registers and Secure Documents (ANRPTS) jointly conduct registration to facilitate their settlement and access to vital assistance. Refugees originate mainly from northern Mali, particularly the Timbuktu region including areas around Léré, as well as central Mali, notably Nampala in Ségou region, alongside movements from Koulikoro and Mopti regions. To date, approximately 27% of newly arrived refugees have been registered by the Government. .

Among newly arrived refugees registered by UNHCR and ANRPTS, children account for 58%, while women and girls represent 47%. UNHCR collected testimonies on how deteriorating security in Mali, combined with hazardous flight conditions causes protection risks among newly arrived refugees. 4% of registered refugees disclosed having survived gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, and were referred for appropriate, survivor-centred support.

Given the significant stigma surrounding disclosure, these figures are likely to be under representative. Prolonged insecurity has increasingly forced families to adopt fragmented coping strategies, often sending women and children ahead under unsafe conditions. Unaccompanied and separated children represent 12% of all newly arrived refugees. Flight frequently involves extended periods of hardship near border areas followed by long journeys, often on foot, significantly increasing exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse, particularly for women and children.

As the needs continues to grow, additional support is urgently required to sustain protection and assistance for refugees and host communities in Hodh Chargui. Current capacities are increasingly stretched, particularly in relation to protection services and basic assistance for newly arrived families. Timely and flexible support will be essential to enable UNHCR and partners to maintain response continuity, prevent protection gaps, and ensure that vulnerable refugees, especially women and children, are not left without access to critical services as movements continue.

© UNHCR/Bertrand Hamassi Diabe – Aissata (name changed), a Malian refugee, stands with her children near a UNHCR emergency shelter following a relief distribution by UNHCR and partners in Djigueni, Mauritania.

“The first days were very difficult, without shelter to protect us from the wind or the cold,” Aissata said. “Now my children sleep warmly, and we have a safe place to rest.”