

# MAURITANIA

March 2021

UNHCR provides protection and assistance to some **63,600 Malian refugees** in the arid south-east region where Mbera refugee camp is located, and to almost **6,000 urban refugees and asylum-seekers** in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

The security situation in Mali remains 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 achieve the inclusion of refugees in the national service delivery system.

UNHCR remains committed to “stay and deliver” and **is providing protection and life-saving assistance** to refugees and asylum-seekers by adjusting its programme under the COVID-19 crisis.

## POPULATION OF CONCERN\*

69,641

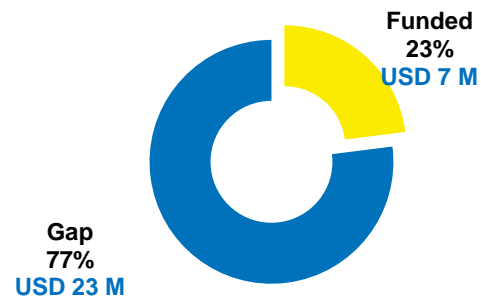


\* Refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR (as of 31 January 2021)

## FUNDING (AS OF 16 MARCH 2021)

**USD 30.6 M**

requested for the UNHCR operation in Mauritania for 2021



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

- 54 National staff
- 20 International staff
- 26 Affiliated personnel

### Offices in Mauritania:

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



A refugee woman in the host community receiving cash assistance from UNHCR  
 ©UNHCR/Kassim Malle

## Working with Partners

- At the request of the Government of Mauritania, **UNHCR coordinates the humanitarian and development 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 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 and international NGOs are indispensable partners of UNHCR.

## COVID-19 in Mauritania<sup>1</sup>

- 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—who were already vulnerable prior to the outbreak of COVID-19—have been heavily impacted by the measures taken to stem the spread of the virus and many lost their sources of income<sup>2</sup>. Since the start of the pandemic, **UNHCR Mauritania adapted and enhanced its communication with refugees and asylum-seekers via various channels (phone, e-mail, social media, messaging applications)** in an effort to raise awareness and prevent the spread of virus in the camp and surrounding areas.

## Main Activities

### Protection

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR maintains and updates a refugee biometric registration database, and provides tailored assistance to people with specific needs through home visits, psychosocial counselling, and support for people with disabilities.** UNHCR 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 State biometric database. Furthermore, Mauritania has started issuing birth certificates to refugee children born in the country and ID cards to all Malian refugees
- **In urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou), UNHCR carries out registration of asylum-seekers and refugee status determination (RSD) within a context of mixed population movements.** It also organizes refugee protection trainings for government officials, including police and military officers.
- In 2020 UNHCR started working with the National Social Registry to include the poorest refugees in the national social protection programme financed by the World Bank IDA-18 sub window for refugees (Tekavoul).

### Cash Based Intervention

- **In line with the UNHCR Global Policy, UNHCR Mauritania continues reinforcing its cash-based intervention both in Mbera and urban areas.** Between November and December 2020, UNHCR distributed cash assistance to 1,594 small entrepreneurs in Mbera camp and 500 most vulnerable households within the host population to attenuate COVID-19 socio-economic impact and overcome the impact of the floods that have hit the town of Bassikounou in August 2020. Further, in line with the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), UNHCR facilitated and coordinated cash distribution by other agencies including WFP and LWF.

### Education

- **In Mbera camp, there are some 20,000 children of school age. UNHCR supports primary education with the payment of stipends for school staff, the maintenance of school infrastructure and awareness-raising**

<sup>1</sup> For more details, please visit: [COVID-19 Mise à jour sur les interventions du HCR en Mauritanie and UNHCR interventions in the health sector.](#)

<sup>2</sup>

**activities to promote education for all.** UNHCR also offers literacy and numeracy classes for approximately 900 adults.

- **In urban areas, UNHCR supported access to primary and secondary education for more than 600 refugee children through 'cash for education' in 2020.** As of the school year 2020-2021, refugee children are being increasingly included in public schools. In addition, the DAFI scholarship provided by the governments of Germany, Denmark and the European Union enables more than 150 refugee students to pursue tertiary education.
- **To minimize the impact on refugee children from the prolonged school closure, UNHCR has been leading the action plan for distance learning in Mbera camp in coordination with local authorities and partners.** The methodologies tested and established in the camp by UNHCR and partners have been recognised as a successful model and are being replicated by seven other departments across Mauritania.

### Health

- **Since 1 August 2020, the national health programme** financed by the World Bank IDA-18 sub window for refugees (**Inaya**) **has been extended to Hodh Chargui region with the support of the World Bank.** In line with the pledges of Mauritania during the Global Refugee Forum (GRF), the deployment of Inaya enabled Mbera camp to be covered by the national health system. Based on the road map for the transition period developed with the government, UNHCR will continue ensuring the free primary health care in the camp at least until the end of 2021 for all refugees.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR facilitates access to the primary national healthcare system for all refugees and vulnerable asylum-seekers,** as well as secondary, tertiary and emergency healthcare as needed.
- **In the framework of the African Development Bank /UNHCR/G5 Sahel tripartite agreement** aiming at easing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on refugees and their host communities in the Sahel region, is handing over in 2021 to the local authorities hygiene and medical supplies, disinfection products, medical and laboratory equipment, personal protective equipment (PPE) and medicines for a total amount of more than \$1.3 million.

### Food Security and Nutrition

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR facilitates monthly food and cash distributions in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP).** Based on 2019 targeting conducted by UNHCR and WFP, 2,623 out of close to 13,000 households have been deprioritized. However, due to the negative economic impact of COVID-19, food assistance for the less vulnerable groups who had not received any assistance was provided exceptionally to mitigate shocks and protect the refugees from resorting to negative coping mechanisms. Necessary measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 especially social distancing, handwashing, and temperature measuring, continue to be mandatory before entry to the distribution centres<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, 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, and 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)

- UNHCR ensures the replacement of core relief items (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 first and second objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees, 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 support to micro and small enterprises, cultivation of gardens and on-the-job training benefitting young women and men from 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. These committees are key to mainstream protection and awareness on environment preservation.** UNHCR also supports projects targeting the host population around Mbera camp, which include interventions to improve access to water and livestock activities.
- **UNHCR facilitates financial inclusion in collaboration with Djikke, a national microfinance institution that opened a new branch in Bassikounou, Mauritania, and its counter in the Mbera camp.**

<sup>3</sup> For more details: *Food and Cash assistance in the context of COVID-19 in Mbera camp / July&August 2020*

## Durable Solutions

- Given the closure of the borders and the security situation in Mali, no repatriation counselling took place since the outbreak of the COVID-19.
- **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<sup>4</sup>:**

[African Development Bank](#) | [Germany](#) | [Italy](#) | [Japan](#) | [Monaco](#) | [UN Peace Building Fund](#)

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

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<sup>4</sup> All donors as of March 2021