

MAURITANIA

September 2020

UNHCR provides protection and assistance to some **62,000 Malian refugees** in the arid south-east region where Mbera refugee camp is located, and to some **4,200 urban refugees and asylum-seekers** in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

The security situation in Mali remains volatile, and **large-scale 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 system from the traditional

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*

66,582

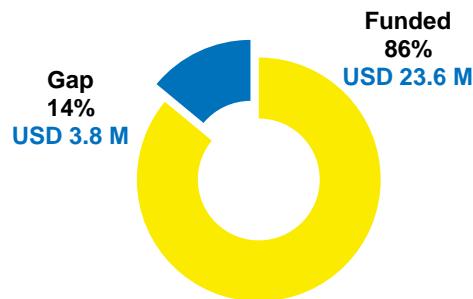


* Refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR (as of 31 August 2020)

FUNDING (AS OF 29 SEPTEMBER 2020)

USD 27.4 M

requested for the UNHCR operation in Mauritania



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

52 National staff
19 International staff

Offices in Mauritania:

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



A refugee girl in Mbera camp received food assistance and core relief items during the monthly food distribution ©UNHCR/Tatiana Saade/2020

Working with Partners

- At the request of the Government of Mauritania, **UNHCR coordinates the humanitarian 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 NGOs are also indispensable partners of UNHCR for the implementation of projects.

COVID-19 in Mauritania¹

- 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. Since the start of the pandemic, UNHCR Mauritania through its offices adapted and enhanced its communication with refugees and asylum-seekers via various channels (phone, e-mail, social media, messaging applications) in an effort to support them as best as possible.

From 8 to 9 July, UNHCR conducted a sampling survey on socio-economic and protection impacts of COVID-19 on refugees in Mbera camp, in partnership with its camp management partner, LWF. Ten trained refugee surveyors visited 102 household (0.8% of the total household in the camp) and asked questions regarding food, health, WASH, livelihoods, education and connectivity, and SGBV/Child protection. The study found that while 100% of the respondents were aware of COVID-19 and appropriate preventive measures, 62% could not afford hygiene items. The study confirmed a strong need for the continuation of the general food distribution as 75% stated that their economic situation was negatively impacted by COVID-19, and that 83 % had to spend their savings to cope during the past 30 days. The summary of the results are available [here](#).

Main Activities

Protection

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR maintains and updates a refugee biometric registration database, 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 Mbera camp. In 2019, in coordination with the government, UNHCR launched registration for Malian refugees residing outside Mbera camp, in the region of Bassikounou.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR carries out registration of asylum-seekers and refugee status determination (RSD) within a context of mixed population movements.** Since June 2019, the out-of-camp registration of Malian refugees was extended to Nouakchott, and since August 2020 in Nouadhibou. UNHCR organizes refugee protection trainings for government officials, including police and military officers, and is advocating for the adoption of a national asylum law.
- Reinforcement of **communication with communities** to prevent the propagation of the COVID-19 has been a key priority. Trained refugee community mobilisers were among the first to start building networks for awareness raising

¹ For more details, please visit: UNHCR Mauritania (September 2020) COVID-19 Mise à jour sur les interventions du HCR en Mauritanie

on preventive measures including social distancing and hand washing both in Mbera camp and host communities, urban areas, and key border points. In collaboration with partners and local authorities, UNHCR distributed more than 15,000 awareness-raising posters and leaflets in the Hodh Chargui region.

Cash Based Intervention

- **In 2020, in line with the UNHCR Global Policy, UNHCR Mauritania continues reinforcing its cash-based intervention both in Mbera and urban areas.** Some 653 refugees in April and 698 refugees in July in Mbera camp and 130 refugees in urban areas with specific needs have received cash assistance to satisfy part of their basic needs. CBI plays an important role in the fight against COVID-19. Around 2,500 refugees in urban areas received cash for social protection to mitigate the immediate shock from job loss, while 599 refugee families received cash for shelter so that social distance is ensured. 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 activities to promote education for all.** UNHCR also offers literacy and numeracy classes for approximately 200 adults.
- **In urban areas, UNHCR supports access to primary and secondary education for more than 500 refugee children through 'cash for education'.** In addition, the DAFI scholarship provided by the governments of Germany and Denmark enables more than 100 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.** Among the methodologies tested in the camp, teaching in small group, broadcast through local radio and WhatsApp have been particularly effective given the connectivity issue in the camp. The methodologies tested and established in the camp have been recognised as a successful model and is being replicated by seven other departments across Mauritania. A discussion with the local authorities for capacity development of teachers in the camp is ongoing as a post-COVID intervention, as 75 per cent do not hold official certificates for teaching.

Health

- **Since 1 August, the national health programme (Inaya) has been extended to Hodh Chargui region with the support of the World Bank.** The deployment of Inaya enabled Mbera camp to be covered by the national health system as per the relevant pledge of Mauritania during the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). 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 until the end of the year 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 line with its commitment during the Global Refugee Forum, the Government of Mauritania has consistently included refugees in its preparedness and response for the COVID-19.** At the request by the Government, UNHCR has delivered eight Refugee Housing Units to be used as confinement units, six to the main points of entry for refugees from Mali (Doueinkara-Fassala, Adel Bagrou and Gogui/ Kobeni) and two to the health centers in Bassikounou. This is in addition to around fifty shelters for quarantine delivered at Doueinkara-Fassala. In April, UNHCR made available two ambulances at Bassikounou and Nema for COVID-19 interventions. At the request of the local authority, 173 samples of suspected cases have been transported from the Hodh Chargui region to Nouakchott for testing. Further, at the request of the governor of Hodh Echargui, UNHCR together with the NGO Alima and WHO, trained thirty-two youth volunteers to reinforce the community health surveillance system.
- **To complement the COVID response, UNHCR donated anti-malaria medical supplies to the regional health authorities of the Hodh Chargui through its health partner ALIMA;** these supplies will cover the needs of the entire wilaya, which is hosting refugees, as the rainy season begins

Food Security and Nutrition

- **In Mbera camp, UNHCR facilitates monthly food and cash distributions provided by the World Food Programme (WFP).** Due to limited financial resources, as well as in view of the future inclusion of refugees into national social safety nets, an exercise to identify refugees who can be gradually weaned off food assistance was taking place since 2019. As a result, 2,623 out of close to 13,000 households have been deprioritized. However, due to the negative economic impact induced by the closure of the weekly market in the camp, price escalation and general economic slowdown, food assistance for the less vulnerable groups who had not received any assistance for the past several months 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, were mandatory as usual before entry to the distribution

centres². 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, 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)

- In Mbera camp, UNHCR distributed cash for shelter for around 600 refugee families in July so that appropriate social distance is ensured through construction of semi-permanent shelters with adequate sheet roofs and walls. 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 Global Compact on Refugees that encourages states and other stakeholders to foster inclusive economic growth for refugees and host communities, 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 income-generating activities, cultivation of market 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 with socio-cultural and focus groups activities. These committees are also 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.
- In urban areas, UNHCR facilitates access to micro-credit schemes provided by Djikke microfinance institution.

Durable Solutions

- UNHCR facilitates the voluntary repatriation of refugees willing to go back to their country of origin, following counselling on conditions in the areas of return. However, given the closure of the borders, no repatriation counselling took place since the outbreak of the COVID-19. In line with the agreement signed by UNHCR, Mali and Mauritania, UNHCR also facilitates the implementation of a tripartite framework on voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees. However, given the situation in Mali, it is unlikely that large-scale returns will take place in the near future.
- UNHCR promotes resettlement as a protection tool for the most vulnerable cases.

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[UNHCR operation page - Facebook - Stories](#)

² For more details; UNHCR Mauritania (August 2020) [Food and Cash assistance in the context of COVID-19 in Mbera camp / July & August 2020](#)