



# UNHCR MAURITANIA

# YEAR END REPORT 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

Mauritania is signatory of the 1951 Convention related to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol as well as of the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Draft legislation on asylum remains pending. Despite this, national authorities continued to demonstrate willingness to maintain a relatively open-door policy, balanced with security and public health imperatives due to Covid-19 pandemic.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

UNHCR's objectives and interventions are aligned with the [UNHCR Global Strategic Priorities 2017-2021](#) and the Global Compact on Refugees, thus focusing not only on core protection and response priorities, but also on other ones aiming at securing solutions for persons of concern.

## Objective 1: Protect and Respond



### A robust contingency plan in the event of a sudden arrival of refugees

Given the deteriorating security situation in Mali, the Government, UNHCR and humanitarian agencies based in Bassikounou regularly review their joint contingency planning for the Moughataa of Bassikounou and Mbera Camp, which during 2020 could respond to a sudden influx of 10,000 refugees.



### Covid-19 emergency response

An emergency response has been activated to respond to the socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 on both local and refugee populations in Mbera camp and urban areas. Basic services community empowerment and self-reliance support were provided in Bassikounou to respond to the higher degree of extreme poverty, shortage of basic services and very limited sources of income caused by the floods and the covid-19 pandemic.



### Predictable access to humanitarian assistance, targeted based on capacities and vulnerabilities

Following the Refugee Coordination Model, UNHCR has coordinated all humanitarian activities in Mbera Camp and for refugees living in the department of Bassikounou and ensured camp management and the provision of basic services to persons of concern. UNHCR and WFP provided to **3,276 new camp arrivals** food assistance and non-food items as well as cash for hygienic kits and other items during the reporting period. They were served by UNHCR with Core Relief Items (CRI), shelter materials and were included in the general camp monthly food and laundry soap distributions in response to Covid-19 prevention. WFP's monthly food distributions continued not to be able to cover the recommended standard of 2,100 kcal/person/day, but instead, contribute to 1,503 Kcal/person/day delivered roughly 65% in cash and 35% in food. Better-off refugee population categories who are not included in the WFP's assistance scheme, and who were impacted by the

Covid-19 outbreak have been assisted by UNHCR with one-off cash assistance. In 2020, nutrition services were kept running despite of the Covid-19 outbreak. Community-based nutrition activities were conducted remotely wherever possible. Therapeutic and supplementary feeding programs have continued without interruption. Nutrition activities continued in the four health structures throughout the camp including the 4 CRENAS and 1 CRENI. Overall, 412 children were admitted to the CRENAS and CRENI during year 2020.

Basic needs in the camp were addressed through cash-based interventions (CBI) and combined with special donations, such as the 119,337 pieces of secondhand clothes from UNIQLO, distributed to vulnerable refugees and children at school (to support school retention rates).



### **Advocacy for access to territory and international protection for refugees**

Thanks to the close collaboration with public authorities and its partners, access to territory, asylum procedures and prevention of refoulement have been ensured throughout 2020. This was highly important especially during Covid-19 related closure of borders and inland restriction of movement. In urban areas, UNHCR and its partner ensured a more comprehensive legal aid to its persons of concern, by including services such as, monitoring in detention, representation before the court, suspension of refoulement decisions, counselling on labor law, family law, etc.



### **Working towards the adoption of asylum legislation**

UNHCR continues its advocacy for a general review of the national legislation on asylum to ensure more favorable protection to persons of concern. During 2020, UNHCR led three workshops in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou to ensure national authorities have knowledge and respect the international protection standards.



### **Registration and refugee status determination systems with integrity, including in mixed movement contexts**

UNHCR in Mauritania had registered a total of 69,598 persons of concern as of end 2020.

**2,348 new individuals**, predominantly of Malian origin, were registered and documented in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, thus increasing the urban refugee population by 55%. As of end 2020, the total urban population counted **5,735 persons** or **2,759 households** representing altogether more than **40 nationalities** with rich cultural and different socio-economic backgrounds. This population is comprised of 39% children, 59% adults and 2% older people.



As of 31 December 2021, the UNHCR Bassikounou Sub Office had registered a total of **63,863 persons** or **14,635 households**. The population is comprised of 58% children, 38% adults and 4% older people, predominantly of the Tuareg ethnic origin (60.4%), followed by those of Arab origin (33.8%), and to a lesser scale (6.3%) of Peuhl, Songhai, Bambara origins. Despite the

movement restrictions and border closure, the office registered **3,276 new arrivals** throughout the year. UNHCR also continued in 2020 to update and register Malian refugees identified residing out of the camp in the villages of Hodh Chargui region.

In August 2020, UNHCR launched in Bassikounou a joint verification exercise together with the National Civil Registration Agency (ANPRTS), to re-verify the Malian citizenship of **18,977 individuals**, cast in doubt because of technical reasons. Such verification is scheduled to be completed by the first semester of 2021.

 **Civil registration of all persons and the delivery of birth certificates to all children of concern to UNHCR**

UNHCR has continued its work with competent authorities, especially with *l'Agence Nationale du Registre des Populations et des Titres Sécurisés* (ANPRTS), to ensure all refugee children are issued birth certificates by the Mauritanian authorities, with a view to preventing statelessness. A temporary freeze of the enrolment procedures was inevitable from April to August 2020 due to the Covid-19 situation.

 **The issuance of national identification cards to all refugees**

The adoption of Decree 1128/2020 will enable urban refugees to be issued with national identification (ID) cards as is the case with Malian refugees in Mbera Camp to date. Refugee holders of national ID cards will be priorly issued with a unique personal national identification number (NNI) that enables them to access different local services, such as obtaining civil registration documentation, opening of bank account, social registry vulnerability categorization, etc.

 **Quality education for all refugee children and youth**

Following approval by the Ministry of National Education to ensure refugee inclusion into public schools, UNHCR facilitated the enrolment of **78% of urban**

refugee children, despite the significant increase in population in comparison to 2019. In 2020, Covid-19 seriously impacted the education sector by forcing the closure of schools nationwide for several months. Solid distance learning programmes were only set up by very few schools nationwide.

In Mbera camp, the construction of two primary school extensions was completed during 2020, thus contributing to a total functioning of eight primary schools and two secondary schools. Primary school enrolment rate during 2020 marked by 5,570 children was slightly higher than in 2019 (5,293 children), but as elsewhere in the country, education activities suffered



from the general lockdown. Only 804 pupils could attend the distance learning through online (WhatsApp) classes that were facilitated by UNHCR and its partners. The school feeding program that was suspended in 2019 due to financial constraints, resumed in September 2020. Regarding the secondary level, enrollment totaled 410 students by end of the year, from which 141 students achieved the DEF and 36 the 'Baccalaureat'. Adult literacy classes, contributing to capacity strengthening and self-reliance, continued in 2020 and reached almost 900 refugees and predominantly females. Around 600 children of 3-5 years old attended pre-school thanks to UNICEF and its partner support.



### The protection of all persons at heightened risk, including of GBV

*On child protection:* UNHCR continued promoting the inclusion of refugee children in national protection systems, as well as, in community-based child protection systems. Following ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, Mauritania has since been working to strengthen its child protection services. Of note, the standard operating procedures for child protection case management led by the MASEF (Ministry for Social and Family Affairs) have been drafted with UNHCR inputs and UNICEF support. Special focus in Mbera camp in 2020 was given to reinforcing community-based child protection identification and referral. The training of 162 committee members and SOPs put in place have ensured a better case management of child protection cases that during last year counted for 114 identified children at risk (55 boys and 59 girls). Protection activities have also been extended to out of camp refugees and host communities with mainly child protection and SGBV related services. Host community members, especially those living in the

proximities of the camp, benefited from health services and targeted services for persons with specific needs.

*On GBV:* The 2012 National SGBV Strategy continues to remain to date a draft bill, thus limiting protection for SGBV survivors from both national and refugee populations. On the other hand, the legal framework on marriage contains provisions which condones gender-based violence. To ensure community outreach and compliance with Covid-19 restrictions, UNHCR has set up protection desks in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou offices and used hotlines to identify, refer, and respond to protection incidents, conduct refugee status determination (RSD) and interviews, diffuse messages and notifications. Nevertheless, very vulnerable cases such as isolated elderly refugees, unaccompanied and/or separated children and women at risk, were guaranteed regular follow-up through home-visits while strictly following protective measures to prevent Covid-19 transmission. Similarly, protection desk services were also provided at the four community centers in Mbera camp. **151 community facilitators, mobilizers, resource persons and peer educators** were trained to improve identification and case management. **40 new SGBV cases** were identified, documented, and received tailored assistance.

*On Persons with Specific Needs:* 10% of the refugee population in Nouakchott are assessed to have specific needs, including **93 individuals with disabilities**. UNHCR continued trainings for UNHCR and partner staff to ensure better identification, response, and referrals of persons with specific needs, including in national programmes.

In 2020, 8.52% of the population in Mbera Camp are assessed to have specific needs corresponding to **4,693 refugee individuals**, including older persons at-risk, women at risk, persons with disabilities, and persons with serious medical conditions. Such cases have been systematically identified and documented based on the Heightened Risk Identification Tool (HRIT) and coded in the UNHCR ProGres database for tailored follow-up and assistance.

## Objective 2: Include, Empower and Solve



### Humanitarian-development coordination support

In 2020, UNHCR and GIZ finalized the conceptualization, design and preparation for a three-year joint project ('ProNEXUS') that will be financed by the BMZ and will be implemented between 2021 and 2023. The project will provide support to Mauritania for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and will enhance the link between humanitarian aid, development, and peace.



### Inclusion in national social protection programmes

UNHCR has continued capitalizing on the Tekavoul programme funded by the "World Bank IDA-18 Mauritania Social Safety Net System Project II" and worked with the Government to include refugees in the national social protection programmes. As a prerequisite for such inclusion, refugees should be registered by the Social Registry first. The social registry indicated its willingness to include all refugees in camp and urban areas in its 2021 census.



### Inclusion in the national health system

Urban refugees continued to access primary and secondary health care services with the same entitlements as their national counterparts. UNHCR and its implementing partner ensured reimbursement of medical services, medicines, and related medical supplies on a



need base. Pregnant women were sensitized on the available low-cost public medical follow-up plan. In addition, they were assisted on pregnancy monitoring and delivery related costs. The poor national mental health and psychological support services inevitably impacts refugees as it does on nationals in a negative way. Persons of concern with HIV/AIDS have benefitted from reference to "Outpatient Treatment Center" CTA services and comprehensive health care assistance and antiretroviral medication.

In 2020, UNHCR continued to advocate for the inclusion of Malian refugees into the national health system and supported the roll-out the INAYA Project that is financed by the World Bank IDA-18. Within the framework of the INAYA project, UNHCR supported **15 health structures in the wilaya of Hodh Chargui**, including the regional hospital of Nema, with medicines for a total value exceeding 1,400,000 MRU. Additionally, UNHCR supported the national Covid-19 prevention and response efforts through provision of medicines and medical supplies, PPEs, recruitment of health personnel, financing of Ministry of Health training programmes and sensitization campaigns in the region. Children were ensured full coverage of immunization which was successfully achieved through regular screening of all new arrivals in Mbera camp despite movement restrictions. Crude Mortality Rate remained 0.001 death/1,000/month and Infant Mortality Rate became 0.005 deaths/1,000 livebirths/month, thanks to preventive vaccination programmes, early diagnosis, and treatment of illness, improved integrated management of illnesses, improved nutrition status of children and provision of mosquito nets for all children.



### **Inclusion in national water and sanitation services**

Access to safe and clean water stood at an average of **20 liters/person/day** as per the standard. Additionally, the distance from the household to the nearest water collection point was kept with less than 200 m. The operational water taps in place (534 taps) cover in average rate **117 persons/ tap** against standard: 80persons/tap. Whereas the water treatment system has been improved through the installation of dosing pumps (DOSATRON), the perished water supply infrastructure, the frequent acts of vandalism against taps and water pipes and the lack of alternate energy systems do not allow for keeping the water supply system at its standards. Moreover, due to budgetary constraints the quantity of water in the source has been further reduced at a rate of 35m<sup>3</sup>/day from 50 m<sup>3</sup>/day in 2018 and 70 m<sup>3</sup>/day in the previous years. Notably such reduction goes in opposite trend with the continuously increasing population in the camp and climate change impacts, thus endangering the community's access to water and potentially becoming a source for inter and intra community conflicts in the region.

According to 2020 CAP survey there has been an improvement in the hygiene of the camp with **73.5% of households capable of managing their household waste correctly**, and with no outbreak of diarrhea cases during the reporting period.

Despite access restrictions to the camp caused by Covid-19 outbreak, there was no interruption in delivery of basic services (*desludging and removal of solid waste*), construction of some **50 new latrines** and hygiene promotion activities with the refugee community. Notably, also a pilot experience of planting **2,000 trees** through

latrine sludge recovery was carried out in collaboration with VRPC and 200 women were trained on safe waste recovery, management, and germination techniques.



### The use of cash-based interventions, resilience, and economic inclusion

In urban areas, UNHCR has assisted more than 60% of persons of concern through a prioritized cash-based intervention for a 3-month period, following assessment of a very limited Covid-19 shock absorption capacity by the refugee population. While access to the labor market still needs to be regularized formally,



UNHCR advocated for the inclusion of refugees into national employment programmes. In Mbera camp, UNHCR has included both refugees and host communities in its livelihoods interventions consisting of cash grants to support local entrepreneurs (1,095 households in the camp and 500 households in the surrounding areas) to set up their microenterprises.

Furthermore, UNHCR and ILO worked together to support local economic development opportunities through the support to a meat transformation facility (dry/smoked meat) and a handicraft center). In 2020, UNHCR promoted green strategies such as reforestation efforts, support for gardening etc. Finally, UNHCR supported the construction of basic public infrastructure in Bassikounou such as the rehabilitation to the road connecting the camp to the Bassikounou-Fassala main road and the construction of dykes in Fassala, Bassikounou and Lemghaiss.



### Urbanization and habitat

At the end of the reporting period, 68.4% of camp households lived in adequate dwellings. UNHCR continued to provide rehabilitation and maintenance of infrastructures at Mbera camp and partial shelter kits and cash grants to cover gaps to targeted families impacted negatively by the lockdown.



### **Inclusion in the national education system**

Whereas in Mbera camp students follow the Malian curriculum, refugee children in urban areas benefitted from the approval of the Ministry of National Education of their enrollment in public schools. As such they received adequate counselling, orientation, and support on enrollment into primary and secondary public schools. **116 refugees** (predominantly Malian refugees) are also assisted through DAFI higher education excellence scholarships in Nouakchott universities.



### **Resettlement and complementary pathways**

Despite the delays in the resettlement activities due to Covid-19 border closures, **11 urban refugee families** (20 individuals) were supported for their trip to France, Sweden and Netherlands during 2020.

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