



COVID-19 - Communicating with Refugees in Mauritania



**65,255
POCs in
Mauritania**

*Figures as of
31 March 2020*

**\$ 100,000
Needed for
Communication
with the
Communities**

*Needs as of
April, 2020*

Risk Communication and Community Engagement

Refugees have the right to be informed about issues and decisions affecting their lives. Information is a form of assistance in itself; access to accurate information allows people to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their families.

UNHCR's Age Gender and Diversity Policy stresses the importance of transparent communication in languages, formats and media that are contextually appropriate and accessible for all groups in a community.



What is being done?



UNHCR in Mauritania is using the material published by the Ministry of Health and WHO in French and Arabic to communicate on COVID-19 with refugees living in urban centres and at Mbera camp. Community-based networks and key influencers have played a vital role in stepping up our two-way communication with the diverse refugee communities.

At Mbera camp

Mbera camp provides a unique model for **refugee self-organization and mobilization**. A refugee-managed Mbera WhatsApp group has been transmitting numerous messages every week since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. It is echoed by the Mbera Education WhatsApp group dedicated to teachers, educationalists and others. This latter group is keen to receive news about how the Education sector at the camp is responding to the pandemic and how it is supporting COVID-19 awareness raising efforts among children and their parents.

Since March, a **crisis committee** including UNHCR and its partners, refugee leaders, teachers and outreach community workers has been set up to manage the communication and mobilization jointly. The training of 226 community facilitators has enabled a door-to-door awareness campaign and mobile messaging throughout the camp in the various languages spoken by refugees. The community mobilizers have also reached out to the local population in villages and towns surrounding Mbera; posters and leaflets have been distributed and displayed in health posts and centres in the region, as well as in community centres and at public and official buildings.

Community facilitators have meanwhile assessed the impact of the awareness-raising campaign with the technical support of Save the Children, UNHCR's partner. Over a period of 7 days (23-31 March), 107 children and 150 adults were asked to measure their level of understanding of COVID. 90% of respondents showed a correct understanding of the messages shared. Door-to-door interventions were found to be most effective in a camp where a large proportion of refugee adults are illiterate; this was followed by social media, and parents for the children.

In Nouakchott and Nouadhibou

In order to mitigate the impact of reduced face-to-face contact with refugees, UNHCR has reinforced its community outreach in urban centres through 35 **refugee community mobilizers** from 12 nationalities and different municipalities of Nouakchott regularly updated on government and WHO messages on COVID-19.

Communication through **various channels** has also been enhanced using posters at UNHCR and partner offices and the Community Centre; UNHCR's hotline and the hotlines for legal assistance and psycho-social counselling to receive calls, enquiries and complaints; email for enquiries; the complaint boxes; as well as Facebook posts. Additional tools are under development to support bulk SMS and WhatsApp messaging.

UNHCR Protection staff have also called targeted urban refugees; **direct contact** over the phone in French, Arabic, English and other African languages has enabled UNHCR to assess the socio-economic impact on refugee household and introduce targeted Cash for Social Protection benefiting over 1,000 households. Refugee community mobilizers were instrumental in helping UNHCR get in touch with **hard-to-reach and marginalized refugees**.



Both in Mbera camp and in the urban centres of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, additional specific messages with both men and women on SGBV, child protection and psychosocial support are being developed for communication through outreach community workers and community structures, as well as targeted awareness interventions for people living with disabilities and persons at heightened risk.

**UNHCR's toll-free
Hotlines**

**Mbera camp
8000 3002**

**Nouakchott
8000 3000**

**Nouadhibou
8000 3001**