

Mauritania

15 January 2018

Mauritania hosts over **2,362 urban refugees and asylum-seekers** and about **50,000 Malian refugees** in Mbera, a camp established in 2012 in the arid south-eastern region close to the Malian border.

Despite the conclusion of a peace agreement in 2015, **large-scale returns of Malian refugees are not expected** due to persistent violence in northern Mali. In December alone, **104 new arrivals** were registered in Mbera.

As the situation in northern Mali continues to be unstable, Mauritania struggles to cope with the growing needs of new refugees and the vulnerable host communities.

KEY INDICATORS

4,293

New arrivals from Mali in 2017

713

Voluntary returns to Mali facilitated in 2017

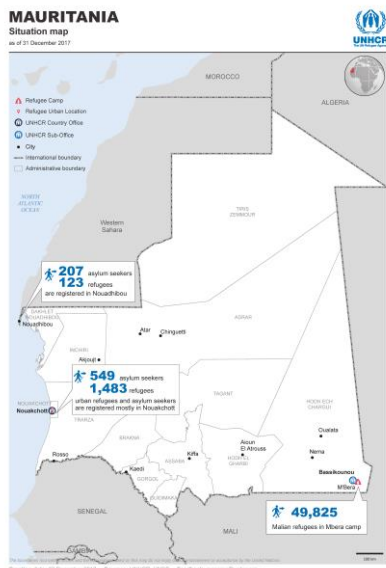
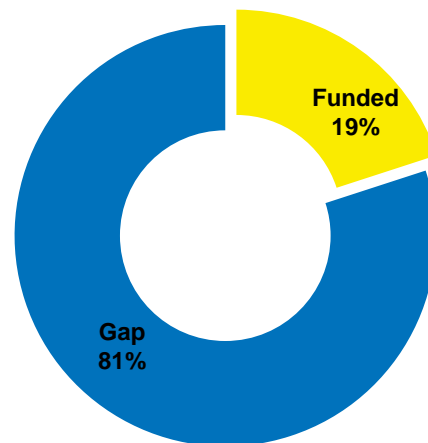
4,572

Malian refugees with **specific needs** (as of 31 December 2017)

FUNDING (AS OF 31 DECEMBER)

USD 19.8 M

requested for the UNHCR operation in Mauritania



POPULATION OF CONCERN

Malian refugees in Mbera camp **49,825**

Urban refugees and asylum seekers **2,362**

A total of **52,187** people are assisted by UNHCR in Mauritania.

Update on Achievements

Operational Context

In Mauritania, UNHCR provides protection and assistance to **49,825 Malian refugees** in **Mbera camp** in south-eastern Mauritania and to **1,606 urban refugees and 756 asylum-seekers** (mainly from the Central African Republic, Syria and Côte d'Ivoire) in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

UNHCR works closely with the Mauritanian authorities towards the **development and implementation of a national asylum system**. Pending the adoption of the asylum law, UNHCR supports the authorities to enhance refugee protection in Mauritania improving access to documentation, including birth registration, basic services, such as health, education, and economic opportunities.

Since 2012, UNHCR has led the **humanitarian response for Malian refugees** in the Hodh ech Charghi region, in collaboration with the Mauritanian Government, which continues to keep its borders open to new influxes, and in cooperation with other UN agencies, national and international NGOs. Despite the conclusion of a peace agreement in Mali in June 2015, large-scale returns of refugees are not yet expected due to the security situation in northern Mali. In June 2016, Mauritania, Mali and UNHCR concluded a Tripartite Agreement for the voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees. This agreement will provide a framework to facilitate voluntary return, when the conditions in Mali will allow. In the meantime, it reaffirms the commitment of Mauritania and Mali to protect refugees.



UNHCR and its partner SoS Desert improved access to water for the host communities in Boulinghala village, located some 15 km from Bassikounou, in the area surrounding Mbera refugee camp. Thanks to an improved well, the communities have started gardening. © UNHCR / Helena Pes 2018

Achievements



PROTECTION

Achievements and Impact

- Widespread insecurity in northern Mali continues to trigger significant waves of displacement into Mauritania. In the month of December alone, **104 new refugees** were registered at Mbera camp. Among them, there were **11 refugee families** who had recently been **evacuated from Libya** to Mali. These families reported widespread insecurity, constant threats of death and kidnapping, extortions and summary executions by armed groups as the main reasons for not staying in Mali.
- UNHCR is about to finalise the implementation of a **new biometrics identity management system (BIMS)** which was launched on 15 August 2017 to improve registration procedures in Mbera camp. Within this exercise, each refugee's fingerprints and iris scans are collected and securely stored in UNHCR's online database to verify refugees' identify and family composition. Up to 31 December, 49,825 Malian refugees have been biometrically registered and hence form the actual camp's population. The decrease of the refugee population from 52,591 to 49,825 people as of 31 December 2017 is mostly explained by absences during registration procedures. However, due to the nomadic nature of the population of the camp, cases of absentees will continue to be revised in the first months of 2018 leading to a more accurate population figure in the coming months.
- UNHCR and its partner Intersos continue to prevent and fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Mbera camp. In December, **229** refugees participated in awareness raising sessions to prevent SGBV. The issue of exploitation of women living with disabilities in the camp was addressed during these sessions. A focus group was organised for **18 community women representatives** to listen to each other and discuss solutions for SGBV survivors in the camp. **27 survivors** of SGBV received **psychological assistance** in their homes.
- UNHCR and its partners identify, document and **assist children at risk** and **vulnerable people** in Mbera camp. In December, **40 host families** of orphans or unaccompanied and separated children, were assisted in cash to ensure child care. **89 people with specific needs** were assisted in cash for the purchase of basic items such as food, shelter and soap. **619 people with mobility issues**, including people with disabilities and the elderly, were assisted during December's general distribution of food and non-food items.
- UNHCR carried out a **protection training** for local authorities in the Brakna and Trarza regions. The training involved **120 police and gendarmerie officers** to inform and discuss with them about refugees and asylum-seekers rights, the asylum procedure and the difference between refugees and migrants.



Sensitizing session about women's rights at a community center in Mbera camp. © UNHCR / Khadijetou Welle


EDUCATION
Achievements and Impact

- In December, about **4,500 children** attended classes in the **six primary schools** of Mbera camp. **270** children above ten years of age enrolled in the first year of primary school are currently attending **preparatory courses** to catch up with regular curriculum. **290 urban refugee** children currently attend school in Nouakchott.
- UNHCR and its partners work to increase higher education opportunities for refugees through the *Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund* (DAFI). **62 new scholarships** for secondary and tertiary education were awarded to the most talented refugees to attend the 2017-18 academic year. 15 of the selected students are girls, mostly from Syria.
- UNHCR and its partners continue to fight against illiteracy in Mbera camp. In December, **165 adults** successfully completed **literacy courses in four languages** (Tamashek, Arabic, Songhai and Fula). The participants were awarded with a certificate upon course completion.



The winner of a drawing context held in one of the six primary schools in Mbera refugee camp. © UNHCR / Khadijetou Welle


HEALTH
Achievements and Impact

- **38 patients** from Mbera camp were referred to Kiffa, Nema and Nouakchott hospitals. UNHCR and its partner, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) ensure medical evacuations for secondary or tertiary medical cases of refugees and host community patients who cannot be treated in the camp or in Bassikounou. **289 urban refugees** received health assistance including check-ups, medical visits and surgeries.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- MSF-Belgium, who is the main health actor in Mbera refugee camp, has publicly announced the termination of activities in Mauritania in September 2018. UNHCR is currently working with its partners, UN agencies and the Mauritanian Ministry of Health to identify potential health actors in order to respond to health needs in Mbera camp. Consequences of lack of health services in the camp would be dire.


FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION
Achievements and Impact

- In December, due to funding gaps in WFP food pipelines, in order to balance food shortages, all refugees in Mbera camp received an **adjusted ration** of reduced food and an increased cash component. The food ration was composed of rice only.

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

- Refugees in Mbera camp are overwhelmingly dependent on food assistance due to very scarce local resources. UNHCR works with partners to improve access to gardening fields and livestock to reduce refugees' dependency on food assistance. Development interventions are needed in the Hodh ech Chargui region to help both refugee and host communities to become more resilient.



WATER AND SANITATION

Achievements and Impact

- UNHCR and its partner Action against Hunger (ACF) continue to ensure that all refugees in the camp have access to clean water and sanitation facilities, including latrines. In December, some major maintenance works for water facilities in Mbera camp were realised with participation of the community. 70 water points were fenced to optimise access.
- To promote hygiene and prevent the spread of water borne diseases, more than **8,000 families** were reached through sensitization activities to raise awareness of safe hygiene, such as public rallies, focus group discussions and door-to-door campaigns. In December, UNHCR supported the set-up of a WASH committee composed of all camp's leaders, women and youth groups to strengthen the community involvement in WASH matters.



CAMP COORDINATION AND CAMP MANAGEMENT

Identified Needs and Remaining Gaps

Due to funding gaps, the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) is at risk of being suspended in 2018. UNHCR recognizes the crucial importance of this service in maintaining protection and assistance in Mbera camp and to allow humanitarian actors to operate in the remotest areas of the country.



The region hosting Mbera refugee camp is particularly remote and hard to reach by roads.

© UNHCR / Helena Pes



SHELTER AND NFIS

Achievements and Impact

- In December, UNHCR and its partner the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) distributed sanitary kits to **all women** in Mbera camp.

**SELF RELIANCE AND PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE****Achievements and Impact**

- UNHCR and its partners continue to promote peaceful coexistence among refugees and their host communities in the Hodh ech Chargui region. In December, **six sports event** were held to foster positive interactions among different communities. These activities reached more than **5,000 youth** in Mbera camp and its surroundings.
- Thanks to a generous UNIQLO donation, UNHCR distributed warm clothes to host communities of nine villages in the areas of Bassikounou and Fassala, near the border with Mali to support them during the cold season.
- In December, UNHCR supported the world-renowned “*Festival au Desert*” from Mali to hold a special concert in Mbera refugee camp. International musicians such as Kader (Algeria) performed with displaced musicians in the camp to spread a message of peace and express support to the cause of the refugees. Several bands, such as Imarhan de Timbuktu, Taflist and Tassaq who have been living in exile in Mbera camp since 2012 participated in the initiative. The Festival au Desert used to be a major artistic gathering in the region before the eruption of the conflict in 2012 put an end to all musical events in northern Mali. The festival continues to take place in exile touring different countries since then.
- Three villages in the Bassikounou area surrounding Mbera camp (Mbentche, Kleive and Néré) were reached by a sensitizing campaign to raise **awareness on female genital mutilation** and women’s rights. About **800 villagers participated** in the event.
- Through its partner SoS Desert, UNHCR works to improve **access to water** for the host communities. Works to dig wells are currently ongoing in two villages in the Bassikounou area surrounding Mbera camp (Sidaty and Guete El Himel).



Boughlingala residents wear newly distributed jackets to protect them from the cold season.
© UNHCR / Helena Pes

Working in partnership

At the request of the Mauritanian Government, UNHCR coordinates the humanitarian response to the Malian refugee situation in close collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization and local authorities. UNHCR also participates in the United Nations Country Team and Humanitarian Country Team and works closely with national and international NGOs.

As part of the Mauritania 2018-2022 UNDAF strategy, UNHCR will continue to work together with other UN agencies to strengthen peaceful coexistence and self-reliance for refugees and host communities in Mauritania's border areas.

Financial Information

Contributions for the operation in 2017 amount to a total of **US\$ 3.8 million**, including US\$3.5 million for the Mali situation.

UNHCR is grateful for the critical support provided by donors who have contributed to this operation. UNHCR also express gratitude especially towards those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and broadly earmarked funds.

Funding received (in million USD)



External / Donors Relations

Special thanks to the major donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2017

United States of America (266 M) | Sweden (76 M) | Netherlands (52 M) | Priv Donors Spain (41 M) | Norway (41 M) | Japan (25 M) | Denmark (23 M) | Priv Donors Republic of Korea (20 M) | Australia (19 M) | Canada (16 M) | Switzerland (15 M) | France (14 M) | Priv Donors USA (13 M) | Priv Donors Italy (13 M) | Germany (12 M) | Priv Donors Japan (10 M) | Italy (10 M)

Thanks to other donors of unrestricted and regional funds in 2017

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LINKS



operation page -  Twitter -  Facebook -  stories

Annex

Breakdown of the main refugee groups in Mauritania

