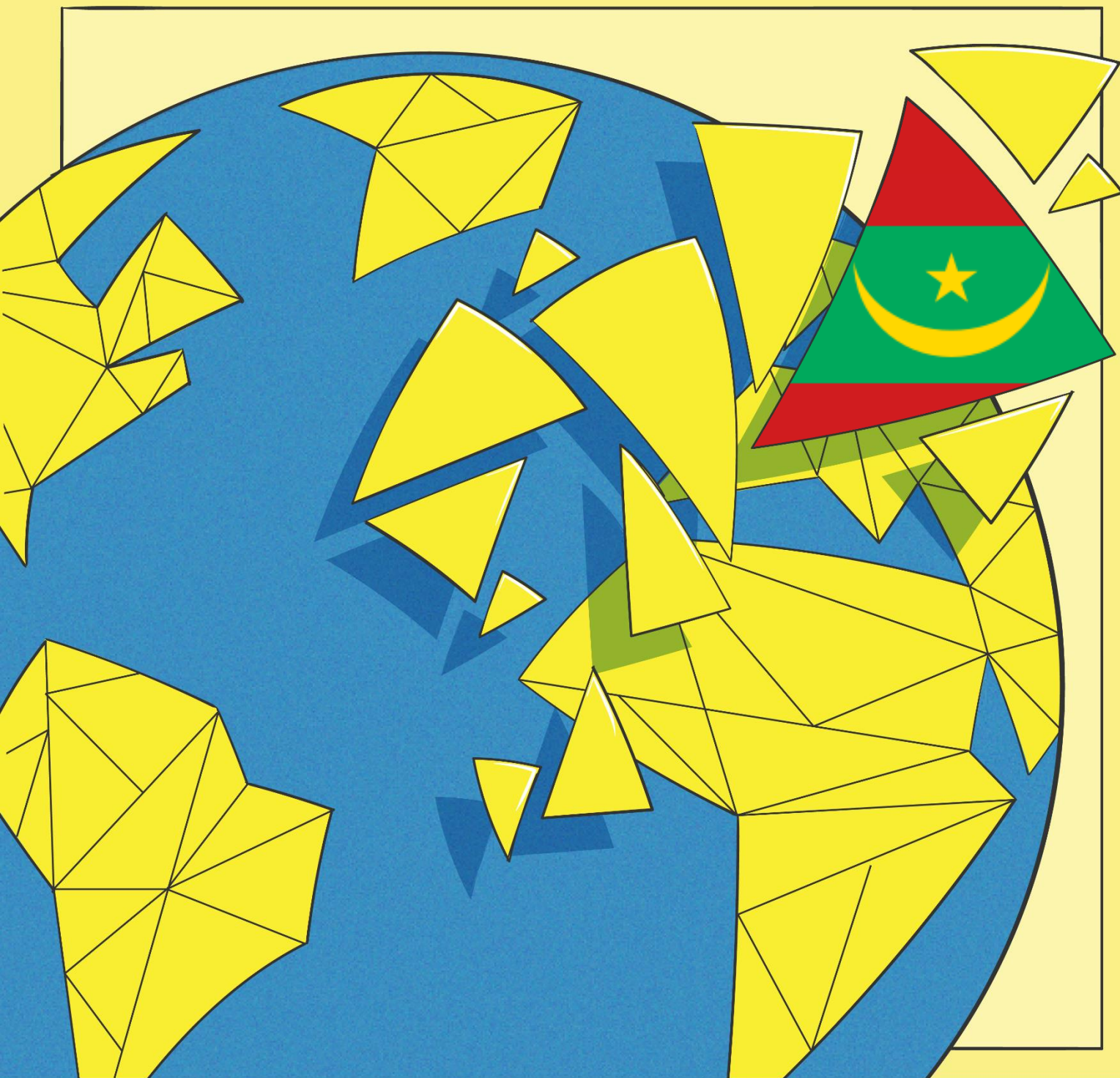


Country Strategy Evaluation Mauritania 2020 - 2022



ORIGINAL VERSION IN FRENCH

NOVEMBER 2023

UNHCR Evaluation Office

UNHCR's Evaluation Policy confirms UNHCR's commitment to support accountability, learning and continual improvement through the systematic examination and analysis of organizational policies, strategies, and programmes. Evaluations are guided by the principles of impartiality, credibility and utility, and are undertaken to enhance the organization's performance in addressing the protection, assistance and solution needs of refugees, stateless people and other persons of concern.

Evaluation Office

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Case Postale 2500
1211 Genève 2
Switzerland
unhcr.org/about-unhcr/evaluation

Published by UNHCR

Evaluation Office Copyright © 2023 UNHCR

This document is issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for general distribution. All rights are reserved. Reproduction is authorized, except for commercial purposes, provided UNHCR is acknowledged.

Unless expressly stated otherwise, the findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this Evaluation Report are those of the Evaluation Team, and do not necessarily represent the views of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States. The depiction and use of boundaries, geographic names and related data shown on maps and included in lists, tables, and documents in this Evaluation Report are not warranted to be error free, nor do they necessarily imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNHCR or the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The evaluation team would like to thank UNHCR teams in Mauritania, Amman and Geneva, refugees and asylum seekers, host communities, national institutions and partners, and the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) members for their availability and contributions to the evaluation process. The members of the ERG were:

| Name | Organization | Role |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--|
| Elizabeth Eyster | UNHCR MRT | UNHCR Representative |
| Souadou Ndiaye | MIDEC/DGAT | Deputy general director territorial administration |
| Sidi Mmed Ebnou Oumar | MIDEC/DGAT | CNCR vice-chair |
| Nazia Chothia | RCO | Strategic planner and Team Leader |
| Mohamed Sidde Dah | WFP | Deputy head of programme |
| Carole Lalève | UNHCR | UNHCR Deputy Representative |
| Louis Falcy | UNHCR | Snr. Dev. Officer |
| Sokhna Thiandoume | UNHCR | Snr. Protection Officer |
| Roupen Alexandrian | UNHCR MENA | Snr. Operations Officer |
| Ethmane Ba | CPPHC | M&E Officer |
| Elbechir Eghdeidir | TECHGHIL | Projet manager ProNexus-TECHGHIL |
| Mohamed Ahid Isselmou | TAAZOUR ALBARKA | Programme coordinator |
| Ducros Momme | IOM | Resilience officer |
| Hamza Ould Bakar | GIZ | Project Manager |
| Bienfait Musongechi | UNHCR MRT | Programme Monitoring Officer |
| Cheikh Ould Toinsi | UNHCR MRT | Liaison officer |

The evaluation team would like to express its gratitude in particular to Ms Elizabeth Eyster, Ms Carole Thérèse Lalève, Mr Bienfait Musongechi (UNHCR representation and coordination team in Nouakchott) and UNHCR field teams in Nouadhibou and Bassikounou for the quality of the technical and logistical conditions put in place for the smooth running of the evaluation mission. The support and methodological expertise of Mr Vincenzo Lionetti, from UNHCR MENA Regional Office, were fundamental in strengthening the quality, ownership and usefulness of the results.

The evaluation team would like to express its admiration to the refugees and asylum seekers in Mauritania for their example of resilience in the face of the consequences of violence and exodus in adverse conditions, and for their confidence in universal human values. The evaluation team would like to warmly thank all the organisations (civil society, private sector) and individuals met during this mission who made themselves available and provided data, information and relevant documents for the conduct of this exercise.

Evaluation information at a glance

| | |
|--|--|
| Title of the evaluation: | UNHCR Country Strategy Evaluation Mauritania 2020-2022 |
| Timeframe covered: | January 2020 until December 2022 |
| Completion Year: | 2023 |
| Type of evaluation: | Country Strategy Evaluation |
| Country: | Mauritania |
| Region: | UNHCR MENA |
| Evaluation manager / contact in UNHCR: | Vincenzo Lionetti, Senior Regional Evaluation Officer |
| Support staff: | Silas Amo-Agyei, Associate Evaluation Officer, UNHCR |
| Evaluation Team | Robina Shaheen, Eva López Trillo, Enric Grau, José M. Baldó, Boubacar Aw |

Commissioned by UNHCR Evaluation Office

Evaluation Quality Assurance provided by UNHCR Evaluation Office

TABLE OF CONTENT

| | |
|---|----|
| Acknowledgements..... | 3 |
| Table of Content | 5 |
| Executive summary | 10 |
| 1 Purpose, scope, objectives and key questions..... | 18 |
| 2 Evaluation methodology..... | 20 |
| 3 Context | 26 |
| 4 Findings..... | 40 |
| 5 Lessons learned and good practices..... | 87 |
| 6 Conclusions | 90 |
| 7 Recommendations..... | 94 |
| Appendices..... | 99 |

List of tables

| | |
|--|----|
| TABLE 01. Summary of interviews conducted | 21 |
| TABLE 02. List of focus group discussions (FGD) carried out..... | 22 |
| TABLE 03. Participants in the workshops | 23 |
| TABLE 04. Some key figures on the socio-economic profile of refugees in Mbera, the population of the HEC region and nationally | 34 |

List of figures

| | |
|--|----|
| FIGURE 01. People with and for whom UNHCR works in Mauritania, 2014-2022. . | 33 |
| FIGURE 02. Distribution of refugees by country of origin and location in Mauritania, December 2022 | 33 |
| FIGURE 03. Changes in the programmed budget (OP) and the available budget (OL), 2014-2022 | 36 |
| FIGURE 04. Ratio between OP, OL budgets and expenditure by budget line, 2020-2022 | 37 |

| | | |
|------------|--|----|
| FIGURE 05. | Trend in implementation rate (expenditure/OL budget) by budget group (2020-2022) | 38 |
| FIGURE 06. | Expenditure trends by Objective and impact area, 2020-2022 | 38 |
| FIGURE 07. | Registered refugees by location (Dec 2020 - Dec 2022). | 53 |
| FIGURE 08. | Weight (%) of funds allocated by CBI sector, 2020-2022..... | 56 |
| FIGURE 09. | Changes in Staff (#) by type of contract, 2019-2023..... | 80 |

Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|----------|---|
| ABOD | Administrative Budget and Obligation Documents |
| ACF | Action Contre la Faim |
| ADB | African Development Bank |
| AFCF | Association of Women Heads of Household |
| AGD | Age, Gender and Diversity |
| ALNAP | Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action |
| ALPD | Association for the Fight against Poverty and under Development |
| ANRPTS | <i>Agence Nationale du Registre des Populations et des Titres Sécurisés</i> (National Agency for the Population Register and Secure Titles) |
| COVID-19 | Covid-19 |
| CBI | Cash-based Intervention |
| CNCR | National Consultative Commission for Refugees |
| CPDD | <i>Cadre de Partenariat pour le Développement Durable</i> / Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development |
| CPPHC | Coordination Unit for Disaster Risk Prevention and Management and Humanitarian and Social Cohesion Programmes |
| DPL | Development Policy Letter |
| ECHO | European Commission Humanitarian Office |
| ERG | Evaluation Reference Group |
| EU | European Union |
| EUTF | EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa |
| FAMa | Malian Armed Forces |
| FG | Focus Group |
| GBV | Gender-Based Violence |
| GCR | Global Compact on Refugees |
| GIZ | German Corporation for International Cooperation |
| GoM | Government of Mauritania |
| GRF | Global Refugee Forum |
| GTA | Grand Tortue-Ahmeyim |
| HC | Hodh Chargui |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| HDP | Humanitarian-Development-Peace |
| HQ | Headquarter |
| IDA-RSW | International Development Association Regional Sub Window for Refugees and Host Communities |
| IDP | Internal Displaced Person |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| IGA | Income-Generating Activity |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IOM | International Organisation for Migration |
| JPO | Junior Professional Officer |
| LDP | Local Development Plan |
| LGBTIQ+ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual |
| MASEF | Ministry for Social Affairs, Children and the Family |
| MIDEC | Ministry of the Interior and Decentralisation |
| MINUSMA | United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali |
| MPCG | Multipurpose Cash Grants |
| MSF | Doctors Without Borders |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| NIN | National Identity Number |
| OECD/DAC | Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OL | Operating Level |
| OP | Operational Planning |
| OPS | Operational Costs |
| PBF | Peacebuilding Fund |
| PDM | Post-Distribution Monitoring |
| PNDSE III | National Education Sector Development Plan |
| ProPEP | President's Extended Priority Programme |
| PSN | Persons with Specific Needs |
| RB-MENA | Regional Bureau Middle East and North Africa |
| RBM | Results-Based Management |
| RCM | Refugee Coordination Model |
| RMS | Results Monitoring Survey |
| RSD | Refugee Status Determination |
| SCAPP | Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity in Priority Regions |
| SCRAPP | Strategy for Accelerated Regional Growth and Shared Prosperity |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Objectives |
| SME | Small and Medium Enterprise |
| SNAT | National Spatial Planning Scheme |
| SOP | Standard Operating Procedure |
| ToC | Theory of Change |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCT | United Nations Country Team |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

| | |
|---------|--|
| UNEG | United Nations Evaluation Group |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNHCR | United Nation Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund |
| UNOCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| UNV | United Nations Volunteer |
| VSB-SMB | Very small business - small and medium-sized business |
| WB | World Bank |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |

Reading notes

- The original version of the report has been written in French. The English version is a machine translation, internally revised by the evaluation team and UNHCR Evaluation Office. The translation has not undergone professional translation and proof editing.
- In line with the new UNHCR guidelines¹, the term "persons with and for whom UNHCR works" has been adopted to replace the term "persons of concern" (PoC).
- In general, the reference to UNHCR in the text also includes partner organisations which play a crucial role in the deployment of many programmes and actions. The systematic use of the term UNHCR and partners has been avoided to make the text easier to read.

¹ Note on selected terminology alternatives to "Persons of Concern (POC)" [to UNHCR]. DIP, March 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE, SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

UNHCR Evaluation Office has commissioned an evaluation of the country strategy in Mauritania at the request of the Representative to assess UNHCR's interventions during the period 2020-2022. The geographical scope of the evaluation is national, but it focuses on UNHCR's intervention areas in the country, namely Nouakchott, Nouadhibou, and the Mbera camp and its surroundings (Bassikounou municipality, Hodh Chargui region).

The four objectives of the evaluation are to: i) assess the strategic relevance, coherence, effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities of UNHCR in Mauritania; ii) provide evidence of how and why UNHCR's interventions have improved or not improved the lives of the people with and for whom UNHCR works; iii) determine the extent to which UNHCR's capacities, structures, and processes are aligned and adapted to the implementation of the strategy; and iv) draw lessons and make recommendations to improve UNHCR's actions in Mauritania.

The evaluated period was characterized by internal reforms within UNHCR, which include: (i) a change in the structure and approach to strategic planning, aligned with the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR); (ii) regionalization and decentralization to strengthen operations in countries through increased powers and additional capacities; and (iii) the development of multi-year strategies at the country level for the first time within the organization. In Mauritania, these reforms are being implemented gradually during the evaluated period but are particularly visible from 2022 onwards.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation adopted principles of participation and utilization and had both summative and formative aspects. It used a theory-based approach as evaluation framework to understand both what worked and why it worked, capitalize on strengths, and mitigate weaknesses of UNHCR's strategy to promote internal learning. The evaluation is organized around four main questions, broken down into 12 sub-questions, organized at three levels - strategic, programmatic, and operational - related to relevance, coherence, coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability criteria.

Data collection was conducted in the field and virtually, using a mixed methods approach relying on primary and secondary sources. Data collection methods included: i) document review; ii) semi-structured interviews (146 interviewees); iii) focus group discussions (10 FGDs organized); iv) observations; v) timelines; vi) participation in UNHCR roadmap, and; vii) reflection workshops. The four workshops for presenting results and discussing findings and recommendations allowed for better participation and ownership of the results.

To structure the analysis, data and results were grouped and examined by evaluation question, investigative domain, and triangulated by data type, method, data source, and

evaluator. Quality control was based on UNHCR's evaluation quality guide, UNEG standards, and good practices from ALNAP and OECD/CAD. It was conducted internally by the evaluation team and externally by UNHCR. The evaluation followed guidelines for integrating gender equality and human rights principles according to the UNEG manual (2011).

One of the challenges encountered by the evaluation was analyzing a three-year period based on UNHCR's annual planning and the introduction of the new planning and monitoring system in 2022. The operational and budgetary impact of COVID-19 in 2020 also altered the analysis of trends. Mitigation measures to address these limitations were agreed upon with UNHCR throughout the process.

FINDINGS

Q1. How has UNHCR positioned itself strategically in the country considering the needs of the individuals under its mandate and the context? (alignment, coherence, and relevance)

UNHCR has taken advantage of a favorable context, with a historically welcoming government that made significant commitments at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF). UNHCR's operations are fully aligned with the country's main development strategies, including Strategy of Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity in the priority regions (SCAPP for its acronym in French) and the Development Policy Letter on refugees and host communities, which clearly emphasize the protection and inclusion of the refugee population. UNHCR plays a key role in various coordination forums and platforms related to the refugee population at the central, Bassikounou, and Nouadhibou levels.

UNHCR had to adapt its operations while maintaining its strategy in a context that, while stable at the national level, was continuously changing and evolving at the conjunctural, protection, sectoral, and funding availability levels. Aware of the limitations and challenges, the UNHCR team made pragmatic strategic choices based on the principle of good collaboration with the Government of Mauritania to improve the living conditions of the people to the best extent possible.

UNHCR's operations addressed protection in two different contexts: mixed movements in Nouadhibou and Nouakchott and the Malian refugee camp in Mbera, which faced an extended crisis situation with no near-term solutions and a continuous influx of refugees. Conceptually, the needs were similar for both population types, but they differed in terms of demographic profiles and modalities of assistance or services received.

At the United Nations system level, UNHCR was involved in all three strategic axes of the UN Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development (CPDD) 2018-2022, and the refugee population is fully integrated into the CPDD. Collaboration between UNHCR and UNDP was crucial for coordinating development and humanitarian actions in Hodh Chargui (HC), a priority intervention zone for the United Nations and the Government of Mauritania (GoM). At the sub-regional level, there was limited involvement of UNHCR in forums addressing Sahel issues, possibly due to UNHCR's organizational placement of Mauritania within the MENA region.

Q2. In terms of effectiveness, what have been the results in the areas of assistance, protection, and solutions?

UNHCR has established technical working spaces and dialogue with key government agencies at both the central and decentralized levels, thanks to institutional trust in its mandate, sustained operational capacity, and expanded territorial presence. The international commitments of the GoM and the willingness of institutions supported by UNHCR contributed to expanding the protection space: access to territory, non-refoulement, freedom of movement, documentation, registration, Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and inclusion. However, challenges persisted in advancing essential issues related to international protection, such as the adoption of an asylum law, access to the 1961 stateless convention, technical capacities of the National Registry of Populations and Secure Titles (ANRPTS) for refugee registration, and registration in remote areas.

Regarding child protection, UNHCR focused on this population due to its high proportion in the camp. Efforts were made in the area of access to documentation, but progress remained limited. Lack of resources prevented a protection response to refugee children in remote rural areas or those exposed to other risks in urban contexts.

In a context of limited access to public services, UNHCR's cash-based interventions (CBIs) have been focused to strengthen resilience and social cohesion. CBI interventions mitigated immediate needs (exacerbated during COVID-19) and contributed to monetary circulation within the Mbera camp and its surroundings, but available data did not allow a precise assessment of their contribution to self-reliance.

Housing, access to water, and sanitation services were maintained by UNHCR at the Mbera camp in a humanitarian model, in the absence of clear long-term solutions with the authorities.

The transfer of health services in Mbera is effective at the management level but not yet at the financing level. UNHCR provided significant support to capacity building and infrastructure, including the response to the COVID-19 crisis, but maintaining quality and long-term funding remains a challenge.

The implementation of the school inclusion agenda in Mauritania is in its early stages. Funds have gradually been redirected from supporting refugee children in private schools to supporting enrollments in public schools in urban areas. In Mbera (which has critical indicators and follows the Malian curriculum), UNHCR has made efforts to explore ways to transfer the service to the national system. The dynamics seem positive, but there are many challenges, including quality, funding, governance, low student enrollment rates, and high absenteeism, which require long-term efforts.

UNHCR has emphasized a community-based protection approach to empower and empower individuals, especially women, who have played a significant role in issues such as persons with specific needs, child protection, and Gender Based Violence (GBV). Community services in the camp are also organized on a voluntary basis, raising questions about sustainability more than ten years after the camp was established,

blurring the line between what should be voluntary and what should be professionalized services.

In an economic and national development context that is not conducive to the self-reliance of the people with and for whom UNHCR works, and in the face of prolonged crisis, UNHCR's operation is one of the most advanced in terms of engagement in the "humanitarian, development, peace" nexus. Its role has been strategic in the process of including refugees, whether through direct actions, advocacy, support to national sectoral institutions, or as a catalyst. UNHCR has initiated actions for social, economic, and financial inclusion, while strengthening national services (health, education) and local development, resulting in transformations. The integration of refugees into the national social protection and health system, self-reliance and employability activities, and private sector involvement are some examples. However, most of these transformations are still in their early stages. Specifically, there is experience in income-generating activities (IGAs) of a productive nature that seem to play a significant role in this economic empowerment, and some value chains are beginning to perform well (e.g., dried meat production, surplus agricultural sales, butchers, gas distribution, textile and clothing trade). However, during this period, when there were no IGAs for urban refugees, the dispersion of data makes it difficult to have a precise view of their effectiveness.

UNHCR has had a clear catalytic effect in the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) nexus, with Mauritania's eligibility for International Development Association Refugee Sub Window (IDA-RSW) funds from the World Bank (WB), the integration of refugees into the UN Development Assistance Framework 2018-22, and Hodh Chargui (HC) region into the convergence zones of the UN Country Team. However, the execution of some development funds has been challenging due to a modus operandi of UNHCR that is not adapted. Despite sharing data and the needs of the people with and for whom UNHCR works, as part of various coordination platforms and bilaterally, there has been some dissatisfaction among actors with the information available on Mbera regarding the activities carried out and the level of knowledge about the socio-economic profile of its population.

UNHCR participates in the coordination and implementation of all development and inclusion actions in the Mbera camp and surrounding areas. However, it currently lacks a comprehensive approach agreed with the authorities that provides guidance on the integration of the Mbera camp into the territorial development plan of the Bassikounou district, taking into account security, environmental, social, urban, economic, infrastructural, and institutional challenges.

In terms of social cohesion, this is a relatively exceptional context where collective efforts, both local and international, as well as by refugees, in Mbera and neighboring villages, have succeeded in maintaining social peace between the two communities. However, in a territory with limited resources and exposed to the effects of climate change, the balance is fragile.

Q3. To what extent have available resources been used efficiently? (staffing structure, regionalization, decentralization, Mauritania - Mali coordination)

The budget growth of the operation has significantly strengthened its presence and scope of action in Mauritania. Despite this continuous progression, there is a widespread internal concern about the inadequacy of human resources to meet the ambitions of the operation (reduction of the backlog for RSD procedures, capacity to respond to a massive influx of refugees, food/environmental crisis, or diversification of entry points). In terms of the organizational chart, the relationship between hierarchies and assignment to functional groups is difficult to discern in some cases (e.g., Nouadhibou, compartmentalization between units).

The regionalization process appears to be very satisfactory from a technical standpoint, with the provision of tools, guidelines, and expertise by the MENA Regional Bureau as needed. However, there seems to have been relatively irregular interaction between the regional bureau and the operation in terms of strategic analysis and discussions (based on the limited available information). The decentralization of the operation in Mauritania is clearly positive in a context of different dynamics by zones and a continuous increase in refugees and asylum seekers. However, several challenges have been identified regarding coordination and communication between field offices.

Q4. How can UNHCR leverage the results achieved, current challenges, and opportunities to better exploit its strategic position, comparative advantage, and influence within the country and the region to advance collective efforts for protection and solutions? (sustainability)

In the period evaluated, UNHCR has worked effectively to integrate the people with and for whom UNHCR works into basic social services and the labor market at various levels and in different locations. However, its strategy appears to be highly dependent on World Bank projects as structuring initiatives for inclusion in the Hodh Chargui region. Furthermore, some challenges remain to be addressed, such as the inclusion of all refugees in basic public services within a reasonable timeframe upon arrival, the sustainability, and the quality of these services.

Given its comparative advantage in refugee-specific coordination, UNHCR's role in the inclusion program and more broadly in the HDP nexus is not well understood by all stakeholders, not even internally, where the two schools - humanitarian and development - are trying to align. There is a perception of competition with development actors.

UNHCR's strategy to support government efforts to promote the exercise of rights and the inclusion of refugees, while effective, has not succeeded in promoting, due to contextual factors, a systemic approach to developing the national asylum system. Therefore, it is not appropriate at this stage to consider the sustainability of the national asylum system.

CONCLUSIONS

Strategic Level

CS1. Institutional protection framework and national asylum system - UNHCR, in support of the Government of Mauritania (GoM), has advanced the protection space and demonstrated responsiveness and flexibility to adapt its protection response to diverse contexts (mixed movements, Mbera camp, increasing arrival of Malian refugees). The GoM's position on asylum and the integration of Malian refugees has been crucial for ensuring protection, although some issues have not progressed as planned (e.g., asylum law, prevention of risk of statelessness and access to civil documentation). However, the delegation of responsibilities from the state to UNHCR (RSD, asylum) may prolong dependence, and UNHCR has not had the opportunity to significantly advance the legal framework and institutional capacities.

CS2. HDP Nexus - UNHCR's work in Mauritania, in conjunction with the GoM, the World Bank, and other development actors, has been fundamental to advancing inclusion, but it is still too early to observe solid results. UNHCR, played a key role in initiating development projects, however, it has faced different logics and mechanisms of development intervention implementation for which it was not adequately prepared. From the perspective of the HDP nexus, the preservation of social cohesion has been a crucial element promoted by UNHCR, but this social cohesion is in a fragile balance due to limited resources, exposure to environmental uncertainties, increasing demographic pressure, and security risks.

Operational Level

CO1. Response to protection and assistance needs - UNHCR has expanded its geographical coverage and adapted its operations to provide an effective protection and humanitarian response to a wide variety of protection needs, changing contexts requiring tailored approaches, diverse population profiles, and successive crises (COVID-19, measles outbreak in Mbera, refugee influx in 2022). However, the operationalization of protection has faced challenges such as: i) modest national resources and capacities; (ii) difficulties in accessing civil documentation; (iii) "temporary" management of RSD by UNHCR; (iv) different situations for access to the RSD procedure between refugees in Mbera and urban refugees; (v) registration of refugees settled in remote locations. The persistence of extreme vulnerability indicators, malnutrition, or the continuous arrival of Malian refugees in the Mbera camp has clearly justified the continuation of humanitarian assistance, as well as the shift towards inclusion and empowerment, especially considering that most Malian refugees have been residing in Mauritania since 2012.

CO2. Response to inclusion and self-reliance needs - Despite initial positive effects, inclusion efforts have faced challenges such as dependency on international funding, the complexity of implementing development projects, difficulties in accessing civil documentation, some sociocultural barriers, and the gradual reduction of humanitarian assistance without a clear improvement in socio-economic conditions in the Mbera camp. Inclusion in the national social protection and healthcare system is the most advanced, although external funds are still necessary for both areas. In terms of education, the

situation of refugee children in the Mbera camp has become critical. UNHCR's visible efforts to promote IGAs as a strategy for self-reliance and social cohesion have been positively appreciated. However, financial inclusion is still in its early stages, despite UNHCR's ability to mobilize the banking sector. Additionally, the limited resources allocated do not reflect the central role of IGAs as a path to self-reliance and self-employment.

CO3. Mbera camp - The orderly management of the camp and the leadership of the refugee community have been decisive factors in responding to the influx of people, providing a humanitarian response, stabilizing the camp, and making it a model of internal organization in some areas. However, the roadmap defined in 2020 by UNHCR for the transition of Mbera ("urbanization") shows modest progress, as some of the premises and actions have not taken place. The absence of a homogeneous vision among national institutions regarding the evolution of the Mbera camp has made it difficult to develop a strategy for its integration into a territorial development plan. In this context, territorial equity appears as a central aspect of social cohesion in an area subject to increasing demographic pressure and fragile balances between communities. In fact, UNHCR's interventions have not been able to prevent the overexploitation of natural resources, creating risks to social cohesion between communities, despite some recent interventions and good practices in environmental protection.

Organizational Level

COrg1. Regionalization and sub-regional coordination - The assessment of regionalization appears to be very satisfactory from a technical standpoint but more mixed at the strategic level. In the context of the situation in the Sahel, UNHCR's response to the sub-regional crisis and the deterioration of the conflict in Mali was coordinated by UNHCR West Africa Regional Office, which limited the integration of the UNHCR office in Mauritania (which falls under the UNHCR MENA Regional Office) into internal forums for strategic analysis and planning regarding the Sahel situation and in international platforms. In the context of mixed movements, communication with the UNHCR office in Senegal does not appear to be clearly structured.

COrg2. Human resources - In a context of growing human resources, there appear to be some territorial, functional, and programmatic imbalances that the ongoing internal staffing review can address. Limited human resources and working in "silos" have been critical factors in the development, livelihoods, registration, and community-based protection teams. Moreover, the decentralization system, with a field unit in Nouadhibou and a sub-office in Bassikounou, presents a challenge in achieving the right balance between sufficient autonomy and ensuring proper coordination and support from the main office. High turnover, especially among international staff, has limited the capacity for knowledge transfer and institutional memory within the operation and seems to have generated fatigue and frustration among national staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Level

RS1. Strengthen political and institutional advocacy (at both central and local levels) for updating and adopting the national asylum law and make progress in establishing effective protection mechanisms (civil documentation, statelessness) within the framework of international commitments adopted by the GoM and its participation in the Global Refugee Forum 2023.

RS2. Reinforce UNHCR's positioning in the HDP nexus and initiatives for the inclusion of refugee individuals to national institutions, humanitarian and development actors, as well as refugee and host communities, with a view to enhance coordination and resource optimization.

Operational Level

RO1. Promote an integrated evolution of the Mbera camp within a territorial development and planning framework with active participation of refugee and host communities, while integrating environmental preservation, climate change-related risks, and a scenario of continuous arrival of Malian refugees.

RO2. Capitalize on the experiences of different offices to strengthen access to protection and harmonization of procedures where possible.

RO3. Establish a system to update profiles of individuals with and for whom UNHCR works, both in Mbera and in urban areas, in order to better document and understand the evolution of socio-economic needs, strengthen advocacy capacity, and evidence-based decision-making, as well as enhance the response to the most vulnerable profiles within an inclusion approach.

RO4. Strengthen the empowerment and economic inclusion of refugee populations based on social cohesion, sustainable development, and enterprise approach (Small and Medium Enterprises -SMEs- and micro-enterprises).

RO5. Strengthen the monitoring system for refugee children's access to education and organize the transfer of camp services to the national system in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including refugees, with a vision of sustainability.

Organizational Level

ROrg.1. Strengthen UNHCR's Mauritania strategic participation with the UNHCR West Africa region to improve coordination and actions related to the Sahel situation and mixed movements.

ROrg.2. Adjust the distribution of human resources within the operation and strengthen the necessary expertise in response to growing needs in terms of protection, inclusion, and the dynamics of location of people with and for whom UNHCR works in various locations.

1 PURPOSE, SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND KEY QUESTIONS

1.1 Purpose and scope

At the request of UNHCR Representative in Mauritania, UNHCR's Evaluation Office commissioned the evaluation of the country strategy in Mauritania to assess UNHCR's interventions during the period 2020-2022 in terms of relevance, coherence, coordination, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. This should provide elements for UNHCR Mauritania's internal reflection as it formulates and updates its multi-year strategy (Strategy 2024-2026). The evaluation's geographical scope is UNHCR operation in Mauritania; although the analysis is national in scope, the evaluation focuses on the localities of UNHCR intervention in the country.

The primary audience for the evaluation is (i) UNHCR Mauritania and (ii) UNHCR RB-MENA. The secondary audience consists of stakeholders of UNHCR Mauritania and key informants of the evaluation (Government of Mauritania; national partners - humanitarian and development; non-governmental organisations; UN agencies and international organisations; private sector; people with and for whom UNHCR works and host communities; UNHCR HQ - Senior Executive Team and relevant divisions).

1.2 Objectives

- To assess the strategic relevance, coherence, coordination, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, challenges and opportunities of UNHCR Mauritania.
- To provide evidence of how and why UNHCR interventions have or have not improved the lives of people with and for whom UNHCR works.
- To determine the extent to which UNHCR's capacities, structures and processes are aligned and adapted to the implementation of the strategy.
- To distil lessons and formulate recommendations to improve UNHCR Mauritania's actions over the next planning period (Strategy 2024-2026).

1.3 Key questions

The evaluation was structured around **four main questions** which responded to **6 evaluation criteria**, and which were broken down into **12 sub-questions** (see Appendix 2. Evaluation matrix). Changes have been made to some of the evaluation questions and sub-questions to reorganise, merge and adjust the terminology.

| Main Evaluation Questions | Evaluation Criteria |
|--|---|
| Q1. How has UNHCR positioned itself strategically in the country given the needs of people of concern and the context? | Relevance, Coherence, Coordination |
| Q2. In terms of effectiveness, what have been the results (intentional and unintentional) in the areas of assistance, protection and solutions? | Effectiveness |
| Q3. To what extent were the available resources used efficiently? | Efficiency |
| Q4: How can UNHCR build on its achievements to date, current challenges and opportunities to better leverage its strategic position, comparative advantage and influence to advance collective protection efforts and solutions? | Sustainability |

The questions have been organised into 3 levels - strategic, programmatic and operational - which structure the analysis as well as the conclusions and recommendations.

2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

2.1 General evaluation framework

The evaluation adopted the principles of participation² and use³, and was both summative and formative in nature. As such, it used a theory-based approach as an evaluation framework⁴ in order to understand both what worked and why it worked, capitalise on the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of UNHCR's strategy, to promote internal learning. The overall evaluation approach took into account the following aspects:

- The environment of UNHCR internal reforms: multi-year strategic planning, decentralization, regionalization, and a new Results-Based Management (RBM) system.
- Usability of results by UNHCR and its partners to support their decision making and adjust their actions, thanks to regular feedback exercises with the evaluation team.
- Awareness of the fatigue accumulated by UNHCR teams during a humanitarian response made worse by the pandemic over more than two years.
- A constructive approach using "light footprint" and "appreciative enquiry" data collection methods⁵ aimed at recognising the efforts made to identify what is working well, what the main bottlenecks are and how to capitalise on learning for change.
- A design based on qualitative and quantitative methods, with a diversity of sources, reinforcing evidence through triangulation⁶.

The evaluation matrix, drawn up on the basis of the evaluation questions, was the main tool for the data collection process; through the predefined analysis parameters, the data collection tools and the verification sources, it structures the thinking behind the drafting of the report⁷).

2.2 Data collection and participation methods

The evaluation was conducted in a hybrid format, combining face-to-face and remote data collection activities. Part of the evaluation team travelled to the three planned sites - Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Bassikounou/Mbera - and two other members of the team carried out remote interviews only. No visit was made to Néma, where there is a recently

² Engaging a large variety of stakeholders and adopting a co-creation approach to define the recommendations, agreed with CO and partners.

³ Developing actionable recommendations for UNHCR's positioning in Mauritania, which take account of the regional and national evolving environments in which the CO operates.

⁴ See Appendix 11. Theory of Change

⁵ Commonly referred to as an 'asset-based' or 'strengths-based' approach to systems change because it focuses on generating positive ideas rather than identifying negative problems. The model uses questions and dialogue to help participants discover the assets, strengths, advantages or opportunities that exist in their communities, organisations or teams, and then work collectively to develop and implement strategies for improvement. Concept originally proposed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in 1987.

⁶ See Chapters 2.2 and 2.3.

⁷ See Appendix 2. Evaluation matrix

established UNHCR field unit , for reasons of availability and timing. The head of the Néma office was interviewed remotely.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both primary and secondary sources. The following methods were used to collect the data:

- Document review based on documents made available by UNHCR, bibliographic research and documents shared by key informants throughout the evaluation process⁸ .
- Semi-structured interviews⁹ with key informants identified during the initial mapping (inception phase) based on an analysis of UNHCR's partners in the country, annual reports and an initial analysis of the context (see Appendix 4: List of interviewees). The selection of key informants ensured the diversity of the different stakeholder categories. Most of the interviews were individual, but there may have been two or up to four people in the interests of optimisation and as long as a confidentiality bias was not identified. A total of 146 people were interviewed¹⁰ (see Table 01), of whom only 27% were women. The interviews were conducted face-to-face (60%) and virtually (40%). A total of 14 interviews could not be carried out due to lack of response.

TABLE 01. Summary of interviews conducted

| Organisation | # of interviews | # of persons |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| HCR | 36 | 42 (28%F / 72%M) |
| National Institutions | 25 | 32 (13%F / 87%M) |
| NGO Implementing Partners | 17 | 26 (15%F / 85%M) |
| UN Agencies | 14 | 19 (26%F / 74%M) |
| IDP Representatives | 5 | 14 (71%F / 29%M) |
| Other NGOs | 1 | 1 (100%M) |
| Donors | 2 | 10 (50%F / 50%M) |
| Private Sector | 8 | 2 (100%M) |
| Total | 108 | 146 (27%F / 73%M) |

- Focus Groups (FG), which were carried out as initially planned during the inception phase¹¹. Only one FG in Nouakchott was ultimately cancelled due to prioritisation given the tight schedule and the start of Ramadan. The FGs focused on participants' perceptions of the role of UNHCR and its implementing partners in the areas of protection, humanitarian assistance, access to basic social services, livelihoods, inclusion and local integration. The number of FGs conducted took into account the

⁸ See Appendix 13. Bibliography.

⁹ See Appendix 5. Interview guide.

¹⁰ See Appendix 4: Organisations interviewed.

¹¹ See Appendix 6. Focus Groups.

challenges of engaging people as well as existence of a certain amount of "fatigue" among the people with and for whom UNHCR works. A total of 119 people took part, with a fairly good gender balance (48% women) (see Table 02).

TABLE 02. List of focus group discussions (FGD) carried out.

| Site | Profile | Areas | # of FG | # of persons | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|----|
| | | | | F | M | Total | |
| Bassikounou / Mbera / HEC | Refugee population in Mbera | Inclusion and resilience | 1 | 5 | 5 | 10 | |
| | | Protection | 1 | 11 | 0 | 11 | |
| | | Youth | 1 | 7 | 5 | 12 | |
| | | Health | 1 | 7 | 11 | 18 | |
| | | Economic activities | 1 | 5 | 4 | 9 | |
| | | Camp management and structure coordination | 1 | 5 | 4 | 9 | |
| | Mbera Staff | Education | 1 | 2 | 8 | 10 | |
| | | Health | 1 | 2 | 8 | 10 | |
| | | Host population around the camp | Inclusion/ Coexistence | 1 | 4 | 5 | 9 |
| | | Host population and refugees together | Inclusion/ Coexistence | 1 | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Total | | | 10 | 53 | 55 | 108 | |
| Nouadhibou | Urban refugees | Inclusion/ Coexistence/ UNHCR Services | 1 | 4 | 7 | 11 | |
| Total | | | 11 | 57 | 62 | 119 | |

- Observations made during the field phase, in particular at the Mbera refugee camp and Bassikounou.
- Timelines, applied at two distinct but complementary levels: (i) to the succession of key developments or events relevant to the sub-regional and national context over the years under evaluation, (ii) to the evolution of the strategy of UNHCR and its partners (identification of programmatic milestones, decisions, and programmatic actions).

- Participation in the roadmap of UNHCR office in Mauritania for the development of its multi-year strategy 2024-2026, through the workshop (Theory of Change) held in Nouakchott in March 2023.
- Workshops, the main aim of which was to share and validate the preliminary findings and conclusions and to develop recommendations together, reinforcing a participatory and co-creative approach. The first workshop was held with the UNHCR team (Mauritania and RB-MENA teams) in April, then with the implementing partners in May and finally face-to-face with representatives of the Mbera camp and the ERG¹² during the month of July.

TABLE 03. Participants in the workshops

| Workshop | # of people | Female | Male |
|--|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| UNHCR and RB-MENA team | 24 | 10 | 14 |
| Civil society partners | 20 | 2 | 18 |
| People with and for whom UNHCR works Mbera | 29 | 14 | 15 |
| ERG | 16 | 5 | 11 |
| Total | 89 | 31 | 58 |

The participation of people with and for whom UNHCR works was ensured through: (i) focus group (FG) during visits to Bassikounou / Mbera and Nouadhibou, (ii) interaction with their representatives and associations during semi-structured interviews, (iii) the feedback and discussion workshop on the recommendations¹³ held face-to-face in Mbera, which was attended by the main community leaders and representatives (ethnic representation) and volunteer associations.

Most of the implementing partners during the evaluation period were interviewed. They took part in a specific workshop¹⁴ to present the findings and preliminary conclusions and discuss the recommendations. On the basis of an exhaustive mapping of stakeholders, carried out during the scoping phase, a wide range of people were listened to through semi-structured interviews (face-to-face or virtual).

2.3 Data analysis and validation

Data analysis was based on document review, semi-structured interviews, FGs, field observations and, finally, discussion and analysis workshops with UNHCR team, partners, Mbera refugee representatives and the ERG.

¹² See Appendix 7. Composition of the ERG: workshop attendance list.

¹³ See section 2.2 workshops.

¹⁴ Ibid

The qualitative data (semi-structured interviews, FGs and a selection of the most significant documents from the document review) was summarised and organised in an evidence matrix (based on the evaluation questions). No specific software was used to analyse the qualitative data. The secondary quantitative data used was triangulated, where possible, between sources of information and acted as a counterpoint to the qualitative data collected. In some cases (e.g. staff, budget), quantitative data was also used, including to identify some trends.

Triangulation based on the multidisciplinary nature of the team ensured a balanced and consistent interpretation of the data for each evaluation question. Data and findings were grouped and reviewed by evaluation question, area of study and regularly triangulated by type of data (primary and secondary), method of data collection, source of information or type of informant (government, civil society, UN agency, donors, persons with and for whom UNHCR works, etc.).

Where disaggregated data was available, the data collected was analysed using a gender and equity approach, in accordance with UNEG, UNHCR and UN System-Wide Action Plan guidelines. The conclusions and recommendations also incorporate gender and equity approaches.

2.4 Governance

The multidisciplinary evaluation team was made up of six experts, including a team leader and a director. Tasks were allocated on the basis of technical, methodological and contextual expertise, and the work was organised with a view to complementing and sharing knowledge within the team. A steering group has been set up¹⁵, comprising the evaluation manager, two people from the CO and the leader of the evaluation team. The group held weekly meetings throughout the process with the aim of monitoring the evaluation process, share preliminary findings, planning the various stages while identifying any difficulties and proposing the best solutions or adjustments given the context.

2.5 Quality control

Evaluation quality control was based on UNHCR Evaluation Quality Assurance Guide, UNEG, ALNAP and OECD/DAC norms and standards. Quality control was carried out throughout the evaluation process at two levels: (i) internally, by the evaluation team through a process of peer review and self-evaluation; (ii) externally, by UNHCR services, in particular by the CO team and the Evaluation Office. The team leader ensured the quality of the data collection process.

¹⁵ See Appendix 8. Diagram of the evaluation governance mechanism.

2.6 Limitations encountered

The main limitations were¹⁶: (i) the availability of key informants during the period planned for data collection and conditions of the national context (e.g. elections); (ii) UNHCR's monitoring system (results monitoring does not focus sufficiently on transformative change, little disaggregation of data, changes in the results framework, little continuity of indicators, heterogeneity of data sources and their quality, which added complexity to analyse data); (iii) the large number of documents shared, which are heterogeneous and of varying quality; (iv) short deadlines for carrying out the field mission due to external factors (e.g. Ramadan) and factors internal to UNHCR (e.g. Strategy 2024); (v) changes in the evaluation team during the mission for external reasons; (vi) modest commitment from the ERG due to the electoral period and difficulties with the agendas; and (viii) the impossibility of organising a FGD in Nouakchott and interviews with children or adolescents, due to time constraints and the need to prioritise.

2.7 Ethical issues

The evaluation is aligned with the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct¹⁷, as well as the UN Supplier Code of Conduct¹⁸, and has ensured compliance with these guidelines throughout all phases of the evaluation. In addition, the evaluation complies with international ethical guidelines and best practice in quality assurance, evaluation processes and research, which do not require ethical approval as long as certain principles are guaranteed. In addition, the evaluation has taken action in relation to the following principles: Transparency; Cultural diversity and inclusion; Independence; Informed consent and confidentiality; Prevention of “retraumatisation” of individuals and communities; Prevention of informant discomfort; Do no harm; Safety and anonymity; Financial compensation (absence). No children were involved in the evaluation.

¹⁶ See Appendix 9. Limitations encountered and mitigation measures.

¹⁷ UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN system (2008).

¹⁸ UN Supplier Code of Conduct (2018).

3 CONTEXT

3.1 National context

3.1.1 Population and human development

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania has a population of 4.9 million¹⁹ with a low population density (4.5 inhabitants per km²) and a balanced urban/rural population (51%)^{20 21}. The population is very young: more than half (56.9%) is aged under 20 and 77.9% under 35²².

Mauritania's Human Development Index (HDI) for 2021 is 0.556, placing the country in the medium human development category. In contrast to other low and medium HDI countries²³ and the other G5 Sahel countries²⁴, Mauritania has maintained its HDI during the COVID-19 pandemic²⁵ (between 2020 and 2021).

When the HDI is revised to take account of inequalities, it falls to 0.371, a loss of 32.1%. The coefficient of human inequality is 31.8%, above that of sub-Saharan Africa (30.5%) and the other G5 Sahel countries (30.7%).

The proportion of the Mauritanian population living below the poverty line (set at MRU 19,100²⁶ per household per month in 2019) was 28.2% in 2019²⁷. Between 2014 and 2019, the proportion of the population living in multidimensional poverty fell from 30.9% to 28.2%.

Analysis of the prevalence of poverty shows that poverty is more prevalent in rural areas (incidence of 41.2% in 2019) than in urban areas (incidence of 14.4%). The prevalence of extreme poverty (population living below the extreme poverty line²⁸) is 12.8% (16.6% in 2014). One in five (20.6%) rural residents live below the extreme poverty line, compared with 4.5% in urban areas.

Unemployment is falling slightly, with four out of ten people of working age (40.2%) in employment in 2019-2020 (compared with 36.6% in 2017)²⁹. Informal employment accounts for 84% of total employment³⁰. Unemployment is more of an issue in large

¹⁹ UNFPA 2023 (<https://www.unfpa.org/data/MR>, visited 01/05/2023), World Bank 2020, 2021 (<https://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritania?view=chart>, visited 30/04/2023).

²⁰ Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de l'Analyse Démographique (ANSADE), Enquête Permanente sur les Conditions de Vie des ménages (EPCV) 2019-2020, 2021.

²¹ World Bank, 2021, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritania?view=chart>, visited on 30/04/2023.

²² ANSADE, Enquête permanente sur les conditions de vie des ménages (EPCV) 2019-2020, 2021.

²³ 83% of low and medium HDI countries recorded a decline in the HDI in 2020, and more than 50% of them even recorded a decline in 2021. UNDP, Human Development Report, 2021-2022.

²⁴ The average HDI for Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad is 0.417 (according to UNDP data, Human Development Report, 2021-2022).

²⁵ According to WHO, Mauritania has 63,617 confirmed cases and 997 deaths from COVID-19.

²⁶ National currency: Ouguiya. 19,100 MRU were equivalent to USD 526 in 2019.

²⁷ The data in this paragraph is taken from the ANSADE report.

²⁸ The extreme poverty line was set at USD 1.90 per day in 2019. The threshold has been revised to USD 2.15 in 2022.

²⁹ ANSADE, Permanent survey of household living conditions (EPCV) 2019-2020, 2021

³⁰ World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritania?view=chart>, visited 30/04/2023, 2022.

urban centres³¹ and particularly affects young people and women³², 30.8% of women are employed (compared with 63.8% of men).

Revenue generation is mainly driven by trade and other services (60% combined), followed by mining (20%).

Access to education remains limited. One child in three (32.6%) aged between 7 and 19 does not attend school³³, 56% of children will attend primary school by 2021³⁴, 25% of boys and 13% of girls will attend secondary school³⁵. Gender inequality is high, with an education inequality coefficient of 40.8%³⁶. Alternative opportunities to the general curriculum are also very limited, and university courses are poorly matched to the needs of the labour market.

For the past 10 years, the main causes of mortality have been malaria, neonatal complications, heart disease and respiratory infections. Access to healthcare is hampered by geographical coverage (the universal healthcare coverage index³⁷ is 53.3% in 2019), and by cost, since 44% of medical costs are paid by the patient³⁸.

There is a wide disparity in the availability of and access to housing-related services: 87.7% of urban households have electricity, compared with just 6.8% in rural areas, 62% of rural households (80% of the total population) have access to drinking water, and almost six out of ten households use improved sanitation facilities³⁹.

Mauritania has structural causes⁴⁰ of food and nutritional insecurity. Low agricultural production covers only around 30% of annual food needs⁴¹, the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity increased by 19 points between the periods 2014-2016 (26.3%) and 2019-2021 (45.3%)⁴². To combat this, the Food Security Office appointed by the President ensures stable food prices, supports the economic activities of vulnerable populations, assists Malian refugees and protects citizens from the dangers of drought⁴³.

³¹ Nouadhibou, Rosso.

³² People of working age (representing 54% of the population) are predominantly women (54.4%) and young people (2/3 of people of working age are aged between 14-35).

³³ ANSADE, Enquête permanente sur les conditions de vie des ménages (EPCV) 2019-2020, 2021.

³⁴ Demographic and Health Surveys in Mauritania (EDSM) 2000-2001 and EDSM 2019-2021.

³⁵ Demographic and Health Surveys in Mauritania (EDSM) 2000-2001 and EDSM 2019-2021. The net secondary school attendance rate is 12.7% for girls and 25% for boys.

³⁶ UNDP, Human Development Report, 2021-2022. The coefficient of inequality is 34.1% on average for sub-Saharan African countries and 40.25 for the other G5 Sahel countries.

³⁷ This index represents the coverage of health services in relation to the health needs of the population.

³⁸ <https://www.healthdata.org/mauritania>, site visited on 11/05/2023.

³⁹ Mauritania Demographic and Health Survey (EDSM) 2019-2021.

⁴⁰ These include the country's desert characteristics, land degradation, falling yields and successive droughts.

⁴¹ WFP, Evaluation of the WFP Country Strategic Plan in Mauritania 2019-2023, 2023.

⁴² FAO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2022

⁴³ Delegation website, <https://csa.gov.mr/>, visited on 09/05/2023.

3.1.2 Economic context

Dependent on international mineral prices, Mauritania's growth⁴⁴ experienced a recession in 2020 (-0.9%), recovered in 2021 (2.4%), and reached 5.2%⁴⁵ in 2022⁴⁶, in response to the rise in international prices for iron⁴⁷ and copper, supported in particular by the rise in production in the extractive industries (and in particular gold production⁴⁸), the strengthening of activity in services, and the performance of the agricultural sector.

The government adopted the “President's Expanded Priority Programme” (ProPEP) in 2020 to stimulate inclusive growth by strengthening the role of the private sector⁴⁹ and investing⁵⁰ in the social sectors, infrastructure, agriculture and fisheries, business support and environmental interventions, for a total of USD 670 million⁵¹ over 2021-2023.

Nevertheless, affected by the global inflationary context, the country experienced high inflation in 2022 (9.5% annual average). Just over half of all households (53%) were faced with a rise in food prices from the start of the pandemic, leading to a one percentage point increase in the prevalence of poverty, from 31.8% to 32.8%.

The medium-term economic outlook is good. Despite an anticipated slowdown to 4.5% in 2023 (WB), the International Monetary Fund expects growth rates to rise thereafter until 2025, reaching 5.7% in 2024 and 6.6% in 2025. Growth should be driven by the extractive sector through higher gold prices, the forthcoming commissioning of the offshore Grand Tortue-Ahmeyim (GTA) gas field, and increased iron production. However, drought, volatile world prices, delays in the GTA and Tiris uranium extraction projects, and insecurity in the Sahel could slow the inflow of foreign direct investment.

3.1.3 Political and institutional context

Mauritania stands out in the Sahel sub-region for its political stability and the democratic electoral processes in place: election of President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani⁵² in 2019 with 52% of the vote, consultations and consensus on the legislative, regional and municipal elections in 2023, and the presidential election scheduled for 2024.

⁴⁴ Real gross domestic product growth at constant market prices

⁴⁵ Data from the World Bank, 2023, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/mauritania>, visited on 02/05/2023.

⁴⁶ This rate is below the growth rate for 2019 (5.8%).

⁴⁷ Sharp rise in iron prices (from USD 76/tonne in early 2019 to USD 160/tonne in January 2021), IMF.

⁴⁸ Gold and copper production fell by 55.4% and 34.4% respectively in 2021. Production in 2021 was partly affected by a fire (in June) at the processing plant at the Tasiast mine.

⁴⁹ To date, the role of the private sector as an engine of growth remains too weak to create inclusive growth that creates jobs. The increase in investment and the impact of the ProPEP will have to be analysed retrospectively.

⁵⁰ To implement the ProPEP, public investment has increased by 52.2% in 2021. Private investment has increased by 37.5%, supported by stronger credit growth (12.6% by the end of 2021).

⁵¹ World Bank, Report on the economic situation in Mauritania, 2022. Only 85% of the 2021 budget was executed, due to under-execution of expenditure on goods and services, transfers and difficulties in implementing investment projects. Four major World Bank projects in Mauritania have included refugees. Two of them are experiencing implementation delays affecting improvements in the quality of life in the Mbera camp.

⁵² Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani was Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces and then Minister of Defence under the presidency of Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz.

The Presidential priorities are national unity and social cohesion through the fight against poverty and economic development, entrusted to the new government agency "Taazour"⁵³. The government is continuing to implement the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity in Priority Regions (SCAPP), the Presidential Priority Project (ProPEP), and a National Council for Decentralisation and Local Development was created at the end of 2021. At the same time, universal health coverage remains an absolute priority.

Mauritania completed its second Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in 2020. Of the 266 recommendations made by the UN, 75% were accepted by Mauritania, mainly concerning the rights of women, other specific groups and individuals, children's rights and the legislative and implementation framework.

Mauritania has not ratified an international treaty abolishing the death penalty, and 29 crimes carry the death penalty. The last execution was carried out in 1987, and according to Amnesty International, there has been 8 convictions in 2019, 1 in 2020 and 60 in 2021⁵⁴.

Despite the reduction in the overall prevalence rate of female genital mutilation in recent years, the Human Rights Committee reports significant persistence in certain regions and among certain ethnic groups. In addition, child marriages remain very common, despite the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Promotion of the Abandonment of Child Marriage 2014-2016 and related activities⁵⁵.

The reintegration of all Mauritanian returnees from third countries into economic and social life is an ongoing issue, as is the updating and adoption of the draft law on the right of asylum. The Committee on the Rights of the Child found that refugee and migrant children living outside the Mbera camp were not receiving the protection and services they needed and were at risk of being exploited in various ways. It also found that asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children were being detained for immigration reasons and that Malian refugee children were being recruited by non-state armed groups to take part in the armed conflict in Mali⁵⁶.

Nevertheless, communal offices for providing guidance and information on rights and obligations have been set up, and a National Observatory for Women's and Girls' Rights has existed since 2022. A National Authority to Combat Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling has also been set up. The regularisation operation of 2022 and the census of migrants resulted in the registration of 142,975 foreign residents at the end of 2022.

⁵³ New agency to combat the legacy of slavery, integration and poverty. It replaces the former Tadamoun from 2021.

⁵⁴ <https://www.peinedemort.org/zonegeo/MRT/Mauritanie#pays-international>.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, Thirty-seventh session, 18-29 January 2021. Compilation concerning Mauritania. United Nations General Assembly, A/HRC/WG.6/37/MRT/2.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

3.1.4 Climate change

Mauritania's climate, which is Saharan to the north and Sahelian to the south, is hot and dry, predominantly desert, with large areas of pasture and arable land representing 0.4%⁵⁷ of the country's land.

Climate change is affecting the country in three ways: (i) in terms of temperature (a general increase of more than 2°C over most of the country by 2050⁵⁸); (ii) in terms of rainfall (more frequent droughts, desertification and flooding), the disappearance of Sahelian pastures and the drying up of the Senegal River; (iii) in terms of ocean waters and the transformation of the coastline (erosion, rising sea levels⁵⁹, coastal flooding and storm surges impacting infrastructure).

Measures to mitigate and combat climate change have been launched: Nationally Determined Contribution, Strategic Development Vision 2016-2030, Senegal River Basin Master Plan, social protection against climate risks with a Natural Disaster Response Fund and the National Humanitarian Action Fund⁶⁰.

3.1.5 Security

Security situation in Mauritania

The Mauritanian authorities have succeeded in preventing the development of insecurity in the country through effective control of the territory and radicalised Islamists⁶¹. The establishment of multi-stakeholder⁶² early warning and crisis management bodies at wilaya level, which are inclusive and gender-sensitive, have contributed to security. At regional level, Mauritania has taken over the presidency of the G5 Sahel⁶³ with the aim of revitalising the structure. However, the geographical expansion of the conflict is keeping the country on high alert and does not rule out attempted armed incursions along the border with Mali.

Current situation in Mali - deterioration of the conflict

A few modest political steps towards a return to constitutional order have cast doubt on the implementation of the peace agreement. On the ground, the Sahel branch of the

⁵⁷ World Bank Group. World Bank Open Data. Data Bank, 2018.

⁵⁸ Rapport de la quatrième communication nationale sur le changement climatique - Cellule de Coordination du Programme National Changement Climatique, Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable, 2019.

⁵⁹ Sea level rise is estimated at 0.3m by 2050, according to the report by the Coordination Unit of the National Climate Change Programme, 2019.

⁶⁰ National Climate and Development Report for the G5 Sahel region, World Bank Group, 2022.

⁶¹ IRIS - Institute for International and Strategic Relations.

⁶² These bodies are made up of senior regional authorities, local elected representatives, security forces and other development stakeholders.

⁶³ The G5 Sahel is an institutional framework for coordinating and monitoring cooperation on development and security policies created in 2014 with Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. Mali withdrew from the organisation in May 2022.

Islamic State group⁶⁴ is continuing its vast offensive⁶⁵ in north-eastern Mali⁶⁶. The escalation of violence against civilians is intensifying, also involving the Malian Armed Forces (FAMA)⁶⁷. The expiry of the EU, G5 Sahel and UN tripartite agreement raises questions, as do the amounts of humanitarian aid⁶⁸, when 8.8 million⁶⁹ people need it, the country has 412,380 displaced persons and more than 200,000⁷⁰ Malians have taken refuge in neighbouring countries, including Mauritania, which is hosting more than 100,000⁷¹. This situation fuels continued displacement of people fleeing the war in the Sahel, with no prospect of return for Malian refugees in the medium term.

3.2 Brief description of refugees and stateless persons in Mauritania

Mauritania has been hosting Malian refugees for decades. When violence broke out in Mali in 2012, it triggered a large-scale movement of Malian refugees, the vast majority of whom are now housed in the Mbera camp, in the Bassikounou moughataa in the Hodh El Chargui region (one of the poorest in the country). With no prospect of large-scale return, and a continuing small-scale influx, the Mbera camp has a population of around 87,000 Malians. Malian refugees also live outside the camp, in the surrounding area and in the two major economic centres of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.

Mauritania is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention on Refugee Problems in Africa. At the 2019 World Refugee Forum, the government made several substantial commitments to advance refugee protection and inclusion, such as the adoption of a national asylum law and related system, refugees' access to the national health system, labour market and civil status documents on the same basis as nationals.

Mauritania is not a signatory to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. However, Mauritania was the only country in the MENA region to make formal commitments at the UNHCR Executive Committee's high-level segment on statelessness in 2019, within the framework of the GRF. Among other commitments, Mauritania pledged to issue birth

⁶⁴ État Islamique dans le Grand Sahel or Islamic State in the Sahel, a Salafist jihadist militant group representing the Sahelian branch of the transnational organisation Islamic State.

⁶⁵ Between March and August 2022, more than 1,000 people were killed in the Menaka and Gao regions, including civilians, pro-government militiamen and rival JNIM fighters. The population of the town of Ménaka rose from 11,000 to 30,000 between March 2022 and March 2023, according to the UN.

⁶⁶ The border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger is known as the "three borders" or Liptako-Gourma zone. The various armed groups fighting there are the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), affiliated to al-Qaeda; the Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad (MSA), which defends civilians and is a signatory to the 2015 peace agreement; and the Groupe d'autodéfense touareg imghad et alliés (Gatia), which defends civilians and is a signatory to the 2015 peace agreement.

⁶⁷ According to MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali), in 2020, the Malian armed forces would have killed more civilians than the jihadists. Also, according to ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, Wagner Group Operations in Africa, 2022), the FAMA would have killed more civilians in 2022 than in all the previous years combined.

⁶⁸ In terms of humanitarian aid, USD 69.5 million has been received, whereas according to UNOCHA, USD 751.5 million is required.

⁶⁹ UN, data from May 2023.

⁷⁰ UN, data from December 2022.

⁷¹ See section 3.2.

certificates to all children born on its territory and to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness within five years of the #iBelong campaign (i.e. 2024). These measures are essential to prevent the risk of statelessness both for the host population and for Mauritanian returnees and their descendants. These commitments are at different stages of progress⁷².

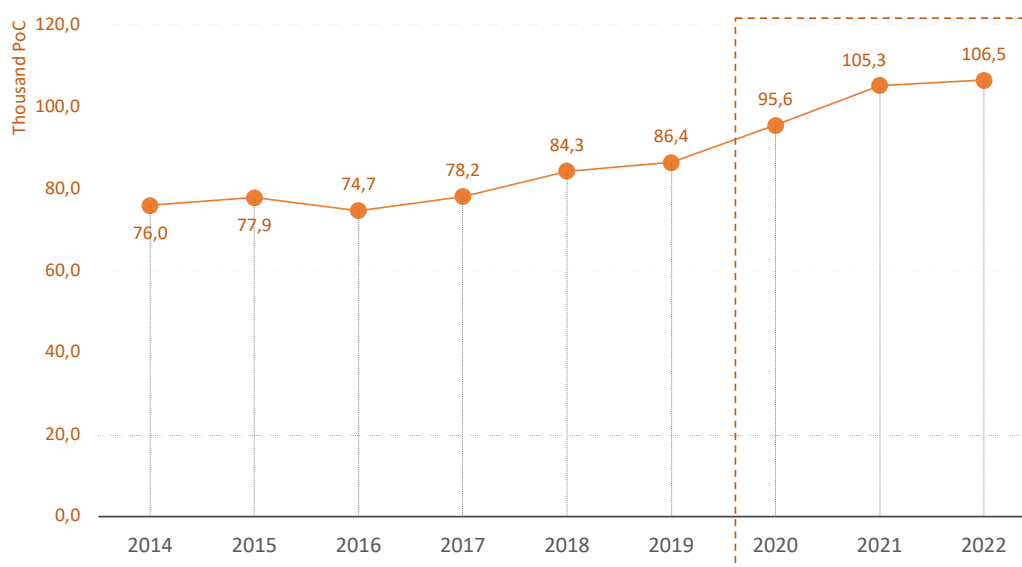
In early 2022, UNHCR and the Ministry of the Interior signed a Memorandum of Understanding which recognises UNHCR's mandate (on a “temporary basis”) to conduct refugee status determination and the validity of UNHCR decisions pending the establishment of a national asylum system. In support of a government decision of 15 December 2020 (Order 1128), this MoU now means that all Malian refugees - including those in the camp who benefit from *prima facie* status and those recognised by UNHCR in urban areas - can access identification documents issued by the Ministry of the Interior's ANRPTS. Recent amendments to Mauritanian nationality legislation have facilitated the granting of civil status documents to Mauritanian returnees since 2021.

While the government maintains an open door towards the Malians, there is a risk of tension with local communities. The growing and prolonged presence of Malians and the difficulties experienced by Mauritians in accessing grazing land in Mali have created enormous pressure on natural resources in the Mauritania-Mali border area. Indeed, climate change poses an additional threat to Mauritania, which is one of the 10 countries with the highest proportion of its population affected by disasters due to natural hazards between 2000 and 2019.

At the end of 2022, UNHCR counted 106,145 people with and for whom UNHCR works. After stabilising somewhat between 2014 and 2016, their numbers have continued to rise, particularly since 2020, despite the closure of the borders by the COVID-19 crisis (see Figure 01).

⁷²<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiMWY2YmYyNzgtZWM1MS00MTQyLThkZWltYjUyODQyZTMzNDU2liwidCI6ImU1YzZMOTgxLTY2NjQtNDEzNC04YTBlLTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOiJh9>
UNHCR's Global Appeal 2023, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/globalappeal2023/pdf>

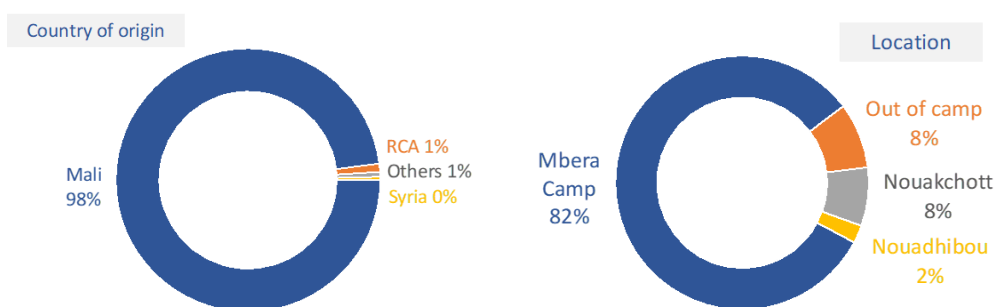
FIGURE 01. People with and for whom UNHCR works in Mauritania, 2014-2022.



Source: UNHCR's Global Focus - Mauritania Financials, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/mauritania>

By country of origin, 98% of the refugees are Malian, followed by Central African Republic and Syria, with refugees and asylum seekers residing mainly in the two economic hubs of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. The people living in the Mbera camp represent 82% of the refugees and are all Malian. Only 10% of refugees live in the urban and peri-urban areas of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou (see Figure 02). Over 80% of asylum seekers live in Nouakchott.

FIGURE 02. Distribution of refugees by country of origin and location in Mauritania, December 2022



Source: Mauritania Operation, 31 December 2022, UNHCR.

The majority of Malian refugees registered at Mbera are Tuareg, followed by Arabs. Groups such as the Songhai and the Peuls are found in more modest proportions. The proportions tend to vary as the conflict within Mali shifts.

By the end of 2022, 51% of all people with and for whom UNHCR works were women, 56% children (aged 0-17) and 3% elderly people (aged 60 and over). In terms of specific needs, women at risk account for 25%, people with disabilities for 18% and children at

risk for 9%.⁷³ However, this demographic profile (gender, age and specific needs) shows different trends depending on the place of residence .

The socio-economic profile of the people with and for whom UNHCR works shows a high level of multidimensional vulnerability (see Table 04). The data presented relates only to Mbera, as it is not systematically available for urban refugees and those living in the area surrounding the camp.

TABLE 04. Some key figures on the socio-economic profile of refugees in Mbera, the population of the HEC region and nationally⁷⁴

| | Mbera refugee camp | Hodh Chargui region | Mauritania |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Children 6-59 months acute malnutrition (CRENA/ CRENI ⁷⁵) | 16,7% ⁷ | 23,5% ¹ | 19,6% ¹ |
| Poverty | 58,6% ⁶ | 28,0% ³ | 28,2% ¹ |
| Primary school attendance | 36,0% ⁵ | 44,0% ⁴ | 56,0% ² |
| Secondary school attendance | 8,0% ⁵ | 15,0% ⁴ | 18,9% ² |
| Drinking water access | 98,0% ⁵ | 74,3% ¹ | 75,1% ¹ |
| Access to sanitation services (toilets) | 91,1% ⁵ | 64,6% ¹ | 72,5% ¹ |
| Occupation (7 days prior to survey) | 12,2% ⁵ | NA | 40,2% ¹ |

Source⁷⁶: UNHCR Demographic profile and specific needs of the refugee population

With regard to the risk of statelessness, some Mauritanian returnees, particularly from Senegal, but also certain sectors of the Mauritanian population, encounter difficulties in registering with the civil registry for a number of reasons (including logistical, technical, cultural and capacity issues). In this respect, and also in the case of birth registration of

⁷³ Mauritania Operation, 31 December 2022, UNHCR

⁷⁴ The data presented come from different sources, obtained using different methodologies (national statistics, SMART, DHS, MICS surveys, survey for the inclusion of Bassikounou refugees in the Social Register, etc., and factual or estimated data from projections or retrospective surveys) and from different periods. We therefore present these data for information only and do not claim to put them into perspective.

⁷⁵ Outpatient Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre (*Centre de réhabilitation nutritionnelle ambulatoire* -CRENA), Intensive Nutritional Rehabilitation Centre (*Centre de réhabilitation nutritionnelle intensif* - CRENI)

⁷⁶ New results-based management (RBM) system, COMPASS

¹ ANSADE, Permanent survey of household living conditions (EPCV) 2019-2020, 2021

² Demographic and Health Surveys in Mauritania (EDSM) 2000-2001 and EDSM 2019-2021

³ ONS - Continuous Survey of Household Living Conditions (EPCV) - 2014

⁴ ONS - Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2015

⁵ UNHCR - Report on the socio-economic survey for the inclusion of refugees in the national register - 2021

⁶ UNHCR - Socio-economic profiling report of refugee households in Mbera Mauritania camp - 2018

⁷ PBF-MinSa portal (2022) - UNHCR Dashboard SO Bassikounou (2022)

refugee children, Mauritania's commitments mentioned above are of paramount importance.

3.3 UNHCR strategy in Mauritania (object of the evaluation)

3.3.1 UNHCR reforms' context and the intervention's logic

UNHCR transformation process

UNHCR's work in Mauritania for the period 2020-2022 is based on an annual planning process, with operational plans for 2020 and 2021 and a strategic report for 2022. The period is characterised by three areas of internal reforms:

- A shift in the structure and approach of UNHCR's strategic planning and budgeting to align more closely with the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).
- The regionalisation and decentralisation reform, launched in 2020, aims to bring decision-making closer to implementation, in particular by strengthening country operations through increased powers and additional capacities⁷⁷.
- Since 2020, multi-year country strategies have been piloted for the first time in the organisation⁷⁸.

In Mauritania, these reforms have been gradually implemented during the evaluation period, with their most noticeable effects starting from 2022 onwards. The operations in 2022 are based on UNHCR Protection Strategy for Mauritania 2021-2025, which is formulated to align with the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the structure of the result framework has undergone a transformation, encompassing four key impact areas: Protection, Response, Empowerment, and Solutions. These are further broken down into sixteen result areas, providing a structured framework for UNHCR's intervention strategy. This marks a departure from the previous framework of addressing rights groups under a total of six targets (Goals)⁷⁹. Additionally, this change has led to a reclassification and adjustment in the number of population groups between the periods of 2020-2021 and 2022⁸⁰.

Intervention logic

UNHCR has structured its humanitarian response⁸¹ in the three areas where people with and for whom UNHCR works are concentrated⁸². The response was built around

⁷⁷ The regional bureaux define regional strategies and priorities, and provide supervision, technical support and guidance for country operations.

⁷⁸ These include the authorities, UN agencies, INGOs, donors, development banks, the private sector and the people we serve.

⁷⁹ See Appendix 10. Intervention logic for UNHCR operations during the 2020-2022 evaluation period

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ See Appendix 10. Intervention logic for UNHCR operations during the 2020-2022 evaluation period & 11. Theory of Change

⁸² See section 3.2 and Figure 02. Figure 02

assistance with basic needs and community building, international protection with responsibility for refugee status determination (RSD), advocacy to improve the asylum system and the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers (basic services, economic and financial inclusion) and, finally, the search for other durable solutions, including the return of Mauritians through bilateral talks and the relocation of refugees to third countries.

The host population in the Bassikounou moughataa (around Mbera) was also supported, essentially through the provisions of direct assistance and community empowerment. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, UNHCR adapted its intervention to support to the national response, led by the government, providing targeted assistance to refugees and host communities, and aiding the anti-COVID-19 vaccine campaign.

UNHCR strategy in Mauritania has been deployed through direct implementation, as well as through partners, including government institutions, international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), national associations (between 12 and 15 per year), and UN agencies⁸³.

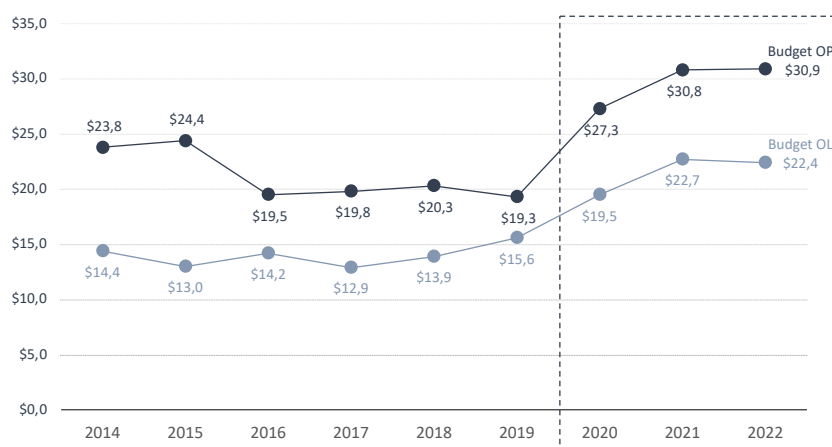
3.3.2 UNHCR presence in Mauritania

UNHCR presence in Mauritania comprises a total of 120 staff in 2022 - 60 national staff, 22 international staff and 38 affiliated staff - United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and Junior Professional Officers (JPO)-, spread over 4 offices - the national office in Nouakchott, the sub-office in Bassikounou, and 2 field units in Nouadhibou and Néma⁸⁴.

3.3.3 Overview of budget distribution 2020 - 2022

The needs-based budget (OP) has gradually increased from USD 27.3 million in 2020 to USD 32.3 million in 2023. The prioritised budget (OL) follows this trend despite a slight decrease in 2022 (USD 22.4 million *versus* USD 22.7 million in 2021) (see Figure 03)

FIGURE 03. Changes in the programmed budget (OP) and the available budget (OL), 2014-22



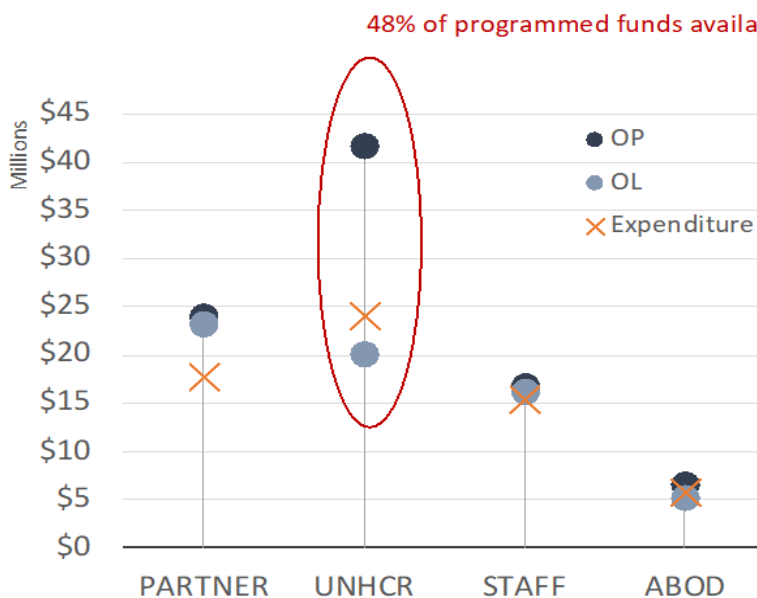
⁸³ See Appendix 11: Theory of Change

⁸⁴ The presence in Néma begins in January 2023, outside the evaluation period.

Source: UNHCR's Global Focus - Mauritania Financials, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/mauritania>

The analysis of the ratio between the OP and OL budget shows a gap that remains high over the period, with an average of around 31%. However, the gap between programmed and available funds varies significantly between budget groups – Operational Costs (OPS) for UNHCR or Partners, Administrative Costs (ABOD) and Staff Costs. Indeed, while only 48% of the funds programmed for the OPS UNHCR budget group are available, an average of 94% is available for the other budget groups (OPS Partners, Staff & ABOD) over the period. This highlights the fact that available funds have been allocated in priority to partners (OPS Partners) and UNHCR structure (Staff & ABOD) (see Figure 04).

FIGURE 04. Ratio between OP, OL budgets and expenditure by budget line, 2020-2022

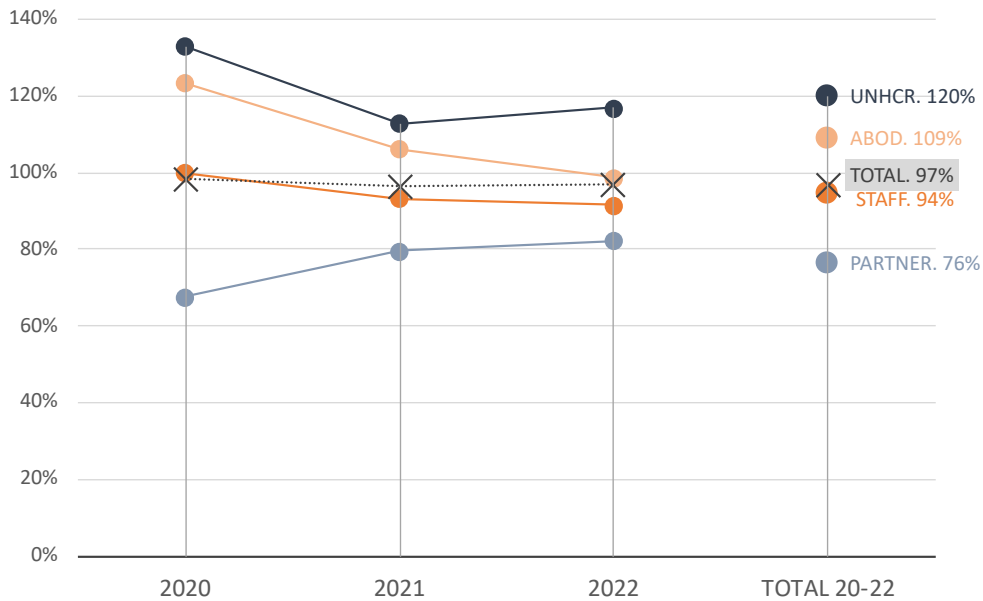


Source: 1_Budget & exp data_with_2022_update - Indicator Achievement Report - 2020-2021-2022_Annual-Results-Report draft.

While the overall level of implementation (expenditure/OL budget) is high over the period 2020-2022 (97%), it is important to note that there is a wide disparity in the implementation of available funds by budget group. The implementation rate for funds available for Partners (OPS Partner) is only 68% in 2020, with an overall average of 76% over the period studied.

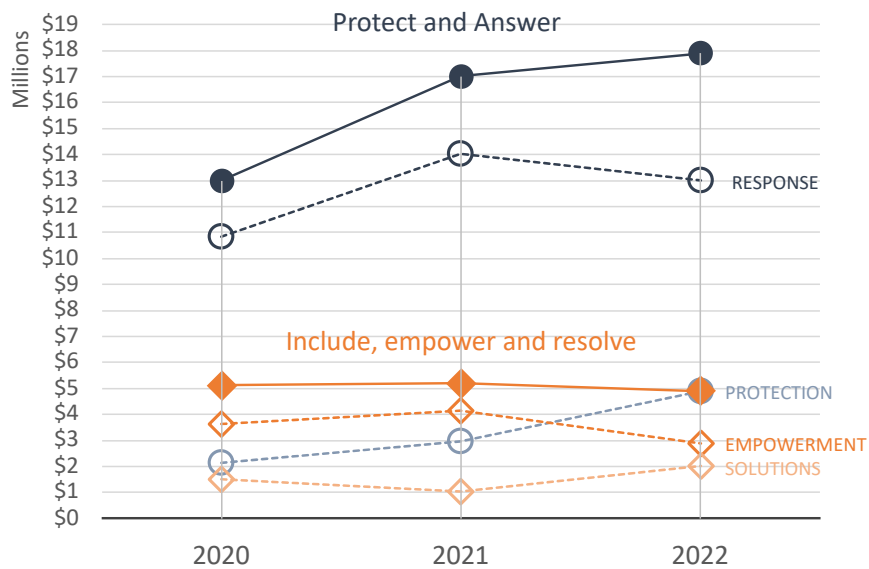
However, this rate reaches 133% of the budget available for UNHCR operations (OPS UNHCR) in 2020, with an average for the period of 120% (see Figure 05). These variations indicate that, probably at the end of the budget year, the breakdown of expenditure between budget groups far exceeds the funds allocated (OL) to these groups, which are themselves adjusted throughout the year. It is therefore difficult to monitor the budgetary process implemented by UNHCR from its programming (OP) to its execution and to assess the justification for OL budget adjustment during the year.

FIGURE 05. Trend in implementation rate (expenditure/OL budget) by budget group, 2020-2022



Source: Budget & exp data_with_2022_update; Operations Plans 2020-2021; 2022_Annual-Results-Report draft

FIGURE 06. Expenditure trends by Objective and impact area, 2020-2022⁸⁵



Source: 1_Budget & exp data_with_2022_update – Indicator Achievement Report – 2020-2021-2022_Annual-Results-Report draft.

According to the new results framework adopted from 2022 in the Mauritania operation, in terms of budget execution, the emphasis has been placed on the Protect and Respond

⁸⁵ Given that the results framework for 2020 and 2021 is different from that for 2022, a mapping exercise has been carried out to analyse all three years.

Objective (76% of total expenditure). While the Response impact area accounts for around 80% of this objective, it experienced a reduction in 2022 to give more room to Protection, which has seen an increase of 128% over the period. Protection accounts for 27% of the target in 2022, compared with 17% in 2020 and 2021.

Budget spending on Include, Empower and Resolve objective remains stable over the period. Expenditure on Empowerment impact area decreases in 2022 (59% in 2022 versus 80% in 2021). As a proportion of total expenditure, it represents 13% in 2022 compared with 20% in 2020 (see Figure 06).

In terms of funding models, the majority of funds come from donor countries, of which the United States is the largest. Humanitarian and development donors round out the contribution.

4 FINDINGS

Q1. How has UNHCR positioned itself **strategically** in the country given the needs of people of concern and the context?

UNHCR has been able to seize a favourable context, with a government that has historically had a welcoming policy and that made major commitments at the World Forum on Refugees (2019). UNHCR operations are fully aligned with the main national development strategies, in particular the SCAPP and the Development Policy Letter (DPL) on refugees and host communities, which show a clear intention with regard to the protection and inclusion of the refugee population.

UNHCR has been the main interlocutor of the public administrations involved in asylum and international protection issues and has developed remarkable relationships at a technical and operational level, although to a lesser extent at political and institutional advocacy. UNHCR has played a leading role in the various forums and coordination platforms relating to the refugee population at central level, Bassikounou and Nouadhibou. UNHCR's leadership in the management and coordination of the Mbera camp has been widely recognised, but at the same time criticism has been levelled at its excessive control and protection of its sphere of influence in a refugee camp that is in the process of moving away from its humanitarian character to become a stable human settlement with social, cultural, political and economic dynamics that transcend the work of UNHCR.

Faced with diverse protection needs and demographic profiles, UNHCR operations have addressed protection in very different contexts and have adapted appropriately to the circumstances of Malian refugees (Mbera and surrounding areas), refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas (Nouadhibou, Nouakchott), Mauritanian returnees and a context of mixed movements (especially Nouadhibou).

UNHCR has also had to adapt to a context which, although nationally stable, has evolved continuously in terms of the economic situation, protection needs, sectorial policies and availability of funds. Aware of contextual limitations and challenges, UNHCR has made pragmatic strategic and operational choices based on the principle of good collaboration with the GoM, in order to ensure the best possible improvement in the living conditions of people with and for whom UNHCR works.

At the level of the United Nations system, UNHCR has been involved in the three strategic axes of the CPDD and the refugee population is fully integrated into the CPDD, with particular consideration of the Mbera camp. Collaboration between UNHCR and UNDP has been fundamental to the coordination of development and humanitarian actions undertaken in Hodh El Chargui, a priority intervention zone for the UN and the GoM.

SQ1.1 To what extent are the country's strategy and operational plan consistent and/or aligned with the work of other partners (government, humanitarian and development actors, private sector, civil society)?

UNHCR has been able to seize a favourable context, with a government that has historically had a welcoming policy and that has made major commitments at the World Refugee Forum in 2019⁸⁶. UNHCR's operations have been consistent with this general trend and, at the same time, have provided advocacy and sectoral support for access to protection and the effective inclusion of refugees. In addition, UNHCR has played its role in promoting protection and ensuring respect for human rights, in particular for people with special needs and victims of gender-based violence and all types of discrimination, regardless of the national legislative and cultural situation.

Collaboration with the GoM has been articulated with the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralisation (MIDEC) as the lead ministry, but also with other ministries and public services, in some cases through partnership agreements^{87,88}. The institutions have recognised the main role of UNHCR in managing asylum and refugee related questions. At Mbera in particular, institutions relied essentially on UNHCR to the point of considering the camp as an "international perimeter", which on the one hand may have served to "attract" and facilitate the mobilisation of international funds, but on the other hand reflected a certain dilution of institutional responsibilities.

UNHCR operations have been fully aligned with the National Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCAPP) 2016-2030⁸⁹, a strategy structured around three strategic levers corresponding to the three strategic axes of the CPDD 2018-2022, axes to which UNHCR contributes. The SCAPP included refugees in its action plan for ensuring their protection in accordance with international commitments. The Development Policy Letter on refugees and host communities⁹⁰, which is in line with the SCAPP, sets out a clear intention to protect and include the refugee population. It sets out the GoM's strategic choices with regard to the management of refugees and host communities in the short and medium term (2018-2022), in the face of concerns about the socio-economic risks derived from the demographic pressure of refugees in the Bassikounou moughataa. UNHCR's operations over the three years under evaluation are clearly in line with GoM's choices, with a view to gradually reducing the presence of

⁸⁶ Mauritania's commitments: The main commitments include: (a) to adopt the national law on asylum by 2020; (b) to register all refugees with the civil registry services to enable them to obtain a national identification number, issue them with a secure national identity card and enable them to be included in national systems, including statistical systems; (c) to ensure that refugees are included in health services on the same basis as nationals; and (d) to ensure that refugees have the same conditions of access to the labour market as nationals. (e) Issuing birth certificates to all children born on Mauritanian territory; (f) acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness within five years of the #j'appartiens campaign.

⁸⁷ Project partnership agreements.

⁸⁸ For example: Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, National Employment Agency (Techghil), General Delegation for National Solidarity and the Fight against Exclusion (Taazour), National Agency for the Population Register and Secure Titles (ANRPTS).

⁸⁹ The SCAPP is based "on the values of Sunni and tolerant Islam, social cohesion and peace, equity and solidarity, national unity, justice and democracy, transparency and human rights within a framework of good governance. It aims to achieve strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with a view to satisfying the essential needs of all citizens and ensuring their better well-being." The SCAPP reflects the government's strategic options for achieving the SDGs.

⁹⁰ The Refugee and Host Community HPA was published by the Department for Business and Finance in June 2018.

humanitarian actors, preserving peaceful coexistence and reinforcing equitable access to basic services and economic opportunities, while considering the long-term development of Mbera's infrastructures.

The regional version of the SCAPP for the Wilaya of Hodh Chargui, the Strategy for Accelerated Regional Growth and Shared Prosperity (SCRAPP)⁹¹ 2021-2025, was drawn up with the support of the Sahel Alliance, using an integrated territorial approach⁹² and taking into account the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and their access to basic social services. UNHCR, through projects financed by the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the partnership with GIZ (Pronexus), and its support to the GoM, has contributed to complement the actions of WB projects⁹³ IDA18 sub-regional window for refugees and host communities⁹⁴.

The revision of the 2005⁹⁵ inter-ministerial decree concerning asylum, along with the government's pledges, demonstrates the State's commitment to grant international protection, access to documentation, integration into public services, and address statelessness. This commitment can be seen at both the central and local levels (Nouadhibou, Nouakchott, Hodh El Charghi, Bassikounou).

Moreover, until the Asylum Act is approved - a process conditioned by political cycles, among other factors - UNHCR is the only body authorised to determine refugee status, which implies some sort of obligation to provide this service, with all the costs and risks of being overwhelmed by the volume of asylum claims (caused by the backlog and the lack of a national asylum system) in urban areas, but also in Mbera⁹⁶.

Coordination with the UN system has been carried out within the framework of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT), the development of the CPDD 2018-2022 and the Common Country Assessment. UNHCR was involved in the three strategic axes of the CPDD (Inclusive Growth, Human Capital and Basic Social Services and Governance) and chaired the UNCT's Communication Group. The refugee population is fully integrated into the CPDD, with special consideration given to the Mbera camp in its broader local and regional environment⁹⁷. In addition, UNHCR has been actively involved with UNDP in coordinating all development and humanitarian actions undertaken in the

⁹¹ Implementation pillars of the Hodh Chargui SCRAPP: i) Promoting the livestock and agricultural sectors, ii) Strengthening access to education, health, water and sanitation, iii) Strengthening decentralization and deconcentration and the justice system.

⁹² Regional consultation and coordination bodies that include TFPs and humanitarian and development actors.

⁹³ The four IDA refugee projects (i) Support for the health system, ii) Social safety net system, iii) Drinking water and sanitation network and iv) Support for decentralization and productive intermediate towns) are part of the 18-23 Country Partnership Framework (CPF) between the WB and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, formulated in line with the SCAPP. The CPF aims to create conditions conducive to sustainable and inclusive growth.

⁹⁴ See details on the implementation of projects in Q2 and the positioning of UNHCR in SQ4.1.

⁹⁵ Article 13 of Decree 2005/022 stipulates that "a beneficiary of refugee status shall receive the same treatment as a national with regards to access to medical care, the job market, social security, and education."

⁹⁶ In Mbera and the surrounding area, Malian refugees are determined on a *prima facie* basis, which simplifies the RSD process.

⁹⁷ Bassikounou and the Hodh Chargui region are the focus of particular attention from development players, particularly the NU (one of the three regions considered to be a convergence zone).

Hodh Chargui region, a priority area for the UN, as well as for the GoM. Joint projects⁹⁸ and partnership actions were carried out with several UN agencies on a bilateral basis⁹⁹. Nevertheless, there are divergent external perceptions of the results of this coordination; collaboration with IOM stands out as a good example of complementarity, while the impression of competition between agencies for sectors and funds is also conveyed.

UNHCR has played a leading role in the various forums and coordination platforms linked to the refugee population at central level, Bassikounou and Nouadhibou. For example, the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM¹⁰⁰), includes institutions at central and local level and stakeholders for all humanitarian and development activities, with structures adapted to each geographical context (intersectoral coordination for Malian refugees in Bassikounou, with thematic groups on protection and response to emergencies and essential needs, a working group in the Hodh Chargui region and the coordination round table in Nouadhibou).

In Nouadhibou, the Coordination Table, co-chaired with the IOM, is worth mentioning as a framework which has enabled the preparation of joint tools and procedures to ensure a good referral system (between UNHCR, IOM, national authorities), in a context of mixed movements. However, the other local forums (Mbera and national) appear to be irregular in terms of attendance, effectiveness and usefulness.

Furthermore, within an overall framework of peaceful coexistence, a modest visibility of host communities' concerns in the RCM was noted. In addition, despite the existence of a regularly updated map of stakeholders in Mbera, several key informants reported a certain lack of transparency and clarity regarding "who is doing what, where and with whom", which may have led to situations of confusion, inconsistency or overlap between the actions of the many stakeholders involved in the camp and the surrounding area.

In addition to the coordination platforms, interaction with civil society has taken place, according to UNHCR *modus operandi*, through partnership agreements. In addition to setting up actions and services for people with and for whom UNHCR works, this work has helped to build the capacity of national partners, particularly in terms of rights and international protection (15 to 16 project partnership agreements signed each year, including around 5 with national NGOs)¹⁰¹.

The interactions identified with the private sector over these three years concern the Mbera and Bassikounou camps, to facilitate access for refugees to banks and micro-credit agencies and to encourage the use of gas as an energy source to replace wood¹⁰².

⁹⁸ Exemples: PBF projects « Consolidation de la paix à travers l'engagement des femmes et de la jeunesse et le renforcement des capacités des communautés dans la région frontalière du Hodh Ech Chargui », with the IOM, and « Consolidation de « a "paix ve »te" en Mauritanie: appui à la coexistence pacifique entre les jeunes hommes et femmes réfugiées et des communautés d'accueil dans la région du Hodh El Chargui », with the UNDP, 18 months and USD 1,500,000 each.

⁹⁹ See more details in Q2.

¹⁰⁰ Refugee Coordination Model: The Refugee Response Coordination Model (RCM) is defined in UNHCR Emergency handbook, <https://emergency.unhcr.org/coordination-and-communication/refugee-coordination-model/refugee-coordination-model-rcm>.

¹⁰¹ See more details in Q2.

¹⁰² See more details in Q2.

SQ1.2 To what extent are UNHCR's current strategy and the country's operational plan aligned with and coordinated with the **Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), UNHCR's Strategic Directions 2022-26, the current and/or evolving needs of the population and changes in the broader country context, and coordinated with UNHCR operations in Mali?**

The period to be evaluated overlaps with two strategic orientation documents and two planning models¹⁰³. The country office was able to make this transition with the development in 2021 of the Mauritania Strategy 2021-2025, which is fully aligned with UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026, the GCR and UNHCR's new planning system¹⁰⁴. Despite the general strategic alignment, it should be noted that in terms of education, UNHCR's global guidelines, which agree that inclusion in the national education system is the solution to be adopted from the start of the emergency¹⁰⁵, have so far been only partially applied in Mauritania. In fact, right from the start of the operation, UNHCR has helped the people with and for whom UNHCR works to enrol children living in urban areas in private schools - mainly because of the quality of Mauritanian state education and in view of a "temporary" crisis - and enrolment in state schools has only recently begun. In Mbera, the education system was "tailor-made" by UNHCR, and other actors working in the camp and followed the Malian curriculum¹⁰⁶, in contradiction with global guidelines and available evidence.

During this period, UNHCR operations clearly worked to share responsibilities, to maintain and strengthen reception and admission, to respond to the different needs of people with and for whom UNHCR works, to support the GoM and host communities, and to seek durable solutions, including inclusion. UNHCR operations have dealt with protection in very different contexts: mixed movements in Nouadhibou and Nouakchott, the Mbera camp in a protracted crisis situation, and a permanent influx of refugees. To also note the efforts to promote development within the framework of the HDP nexus¹⁰⁷. Finally, the environmental approach has been clearly included in interventions in the Mbera camp and the surrounding area¹⁰⁸.

Nevertheless, several limitations and challenges emerged, such as the diversification of entry points for asylum seekers from other Sahel countries, the adaptation of the assistance offered according to the vulnerability of households (in Mbera, classification into 3 groups of vulnerability for integration into the national social safety net system and distribution of food aid and cash from the WFP and UNHCR)¹⁰⁹, the increase in cases of RSD in urban areas, or the political sensitivity of certain situations requiring international protection. In these circumstances, it appears from the information gathered that UNHCR has made pragmatic strategic and operational choices based on the principle of good

¹⁰³ Operational plan for 2020 and 2021 on the one hand, then 2022 under the 2022-2026 strategy, and with a new results framework.

¹⁰⁴ See Appendix 12. Technical note on the analysis of the impact of population growth and agricultural activities on the use of natural resources in the Bassikounou region.

¹⁰⁵ Inclusion in the national education system is the solution to be adopted from the outset of the emergency for the sake of inclusion, social cohesion and child protection, Education 2030: a strategy for refugee education and UNHCR Education Report 2022.

¹⁰⁶ See more details in Q2.

¹⁰⁷ See more details SQ2.2.

¹⁰⁸ See more details in Q2.

¹⁰⁹ See details of SQ1.3 and Q2.

cooperation with the GoM, in order to ensure the best possible improvement in the living conditions of people with and for whom UNHCR works.

From a cross-border perspective, UNHCR's strategy in Mauritania has been aligned with the Tripartite commission agreements signed between Mali, Mauritania and UNHCR¹¹⁰, and has reflected both the commitments made between the two States and UNHCR and the changing needs of the Malian population in the border area. Indeed, the Tripartite commission considers Mali's support for education (teacher training and support) to be based on the Malian curriculum. However, no meetings were held during the period under evaluation (the last meeting took place in 2019), which could be explained by COVID-19 and the instability in Mali, but also by the issue of administrative burdens raised during the interviews. In the meantime, even if the solutions have not yet been found, UNHCR has maintained its efforts to make progress on the main outstanding issues between the two countries, such as the evolution of the Mbera education system towards the Mauritanian system. Communication between the two UNHCR offices (Mauritania and Mali) has facilitated a shared vision and analysis, the implementation of joint actions and the adaptation of UNHCR's response to changes in the border region¹¹¹.

As a humanitarian agency, and with an annual planning system which allows activities to be adapted throughout the year, UNHCR in general has good flexibility and capacity to adapt to a changing context. During the period covered by the evaluation, significant events took place, such as the floods affecting the Mbera area and the COVID-19 (COVID-19) crisis. The information gathered shows that needs were well identified and that solutions were sought for the response¹¹². On the other hand, a number of planned actions were postponed, not only because of the COVID-19 situation¹¹³, but also because of the limited resources available to meet all the needs identified, which meant that choices had to be made¹¹⁴, and in some cases because of difficulties in anticipating or coordinating with other actors beforehand¹¹⁵. In short, UNHCR has essentially had to adapt its operations, while maintaining its strategy, to a context which, although nationally stable, has changed and was constantly evolving in terms of economic climate, protection needs, public policies and availability of funds¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁰ The tripartite agreement between the Republic of Mali, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was signed in Mauritania on 16 June 2016 to provide a framework for the voluntary repatriation of Malian refugees living in Mauritania.

¹¹¹ See question SQ3.1. How efficiently was coordination between UNHCR Mauritania and Mali ensured (in the areas of context analysis, preparation, assistance and solutions)?

¹¹² Examples: Survey on the socio-economic impact of C-19 in the camp, following which a provision of cash was organised for all affected categories, remote actions where possible, provision of cash for people in Mbera not eligible for WFP aid, solutions for continuity of classes for children (whatsapp) and maintenance of camp nutrition services, telephone survey in urban areas on the impact of C-19, focus on people with specific needs, contact with all households with children registered at school, support for the GoM response with the provision of equipment and ad hoc training for MOH health staff on C-19.

¹¹³ Examples of actions postponed or delayed by the C-19 crisis: setting up teams for the RSD system in Nouadhibou, improving facilities in the Mbera camp (e.g. building latrines), carrying out the survey for the Social Register in Mbera.

¹¹⁴ For example, the presence of RSD teams only in urban areas, even though they would have been desirable in border areas, due to limited resources.

¹¹⁵ Example: pumping system for water points in Mbera and surrounding area delayed adapting energy system to local authority requirements.

¹¹⁶ See details Q2.

SQ1.3 Given the increase in the urban refugee population and the different needs of urban and camp refugees, to what extent is the operational plan consistent with regard to urban and camp populations?

For the period 2020-2021, programming has specifically differentiated between Malian refugees (Mbera and surrounding areas) and refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas and Mauritanian returnees. The overall needs are similar for all populations but differ in terms of modality of aid or service provision. The RSD process uses the *prima facie* for Malians registered at camp and surroundings, whereas it follows the standard, simplified or merged procedure in other urban zones (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou). The type of assistance and support offered is also differentiated in terms of basic needs and self-reliance actions (e.g. schools with the Malian education system in Mbera and support and accompaniment for enrolment in public schools for urban refugee children, agreement with the health structures most frequented by urban refugees (and payment through partners) and services initially covered by NGOs in the camp, and later in hand-over to the public system.

In addition, programming was adapted for different population groups to the changing situation over time¹¹⁷ and was implemented through partnerships with specialised national and international organisations. For example, cash-based interventions (CBI) have been adapted to the two groups of refugees (urban, camp) and in the Hodh Chargui (HC) region have included the host populations. In the urban area, the CBI focused on education, followed by the Multi Purpose Cash Grant (MPCG). For the Malian refugees in Bassikounou, the largest CBI share went to MPCG and housing in second place, while for the host population, the majority of the CBI was for livelihoods. In 2021, a considerable portion was earmarked for food, to offset the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the drought.

Although UNHCR has deployed actions to cover the different risks and vulnerabilities according to age and gender, no specific measures adapted to what appear to be local particularities have been identified. For example, in Mbera, the over-60s represent only 4% of the camp's population, but account for 40% of the specific needs identified by UNHCR¹¹⁸. In Nouakchott the male/female ratio remains stable at over 50% male; in Nouadhibou the proportion of female population has decreased significantly over the last three years, although UNHCR register of specific needs shows a significant prevalence of gender-related needs. Nouadhibou has also seen an increase in specific disability-related needs, while Nouakchott has seen an increase in serious medical problems.

UNHCR offices / units throughout the country are coherent with the distribution and concentration of refugees¹¹⁹ and the evolution of diverse population movements. Nevertheless, the political and social context and the availability of funds¹²⁰ have represented a challenge in the face of significant needs and has forced UNHCR to make ongoing choices regarding the prioritisation of beneficiaries and the types and quantities

¹¹⁷ See SQ1.2.

¹¹⁸ Dashboards UNHCR Mauritania operation (DFSP profile)

¹¹⁹ Field Unit in Nouadhibou, Field Office in Bassikounou, antenna in Néma. See details SQ3.2.

¹²⁰ Donor "fatigue" in relation to protracted humanitarian crises; intrinsic system for obtaining and managing UNHCR funds (annual budgeting, OP budget, LO budget, which is updated throughout the year, expenditure).

of aid provided. Even though the choices were carefully considered, on the basis of information obtained from the people with and for whom UNHCR works¹²¹, frustrations and misunderstandings emerged. Examples include: (i) in Mbera, the gradual reduction of in cash support or in-kind, the limitation of IGAs or the classification into three vulnerability groups (after the six groups used since the beginning¹²², (ii) in Nouadhibou, the cost of transport to get to the health centre, (iii) in both contexts, the difficulty of finding a stable and sufficient source of income.

With regard to the “management architecture” of the Mbera camp, there have been changes in the portfolio of partner organisations involved in the various camp services with the aim: i) to encourage the presence of specialised organisations to fill gaps in some services; ii) to promote community empowerment (hybrid formulas between partners and refugees for the provision of services); iii) to strengthen the presence and role of national institutions and public programmes, with a view to inclusion (e.g. TECHGHIL, Inaya). Alongside the positive changes (e.g. increased presence of national organisations, sustainability perspective, promotion of livelihood actions), the evaluation documented concerns about a camp management “architecture” that results in relevant running / transaction costs, sometimes with limited contribution to the refugee community. This “management architecture” was also conditioned by the limitations of national programmes to absorb or take full ownership of the management and delivery of services in Mbera (e.g. the presence of a specialised partner in health despite progress in transferring service delivery to the national health system). In addition, the capacity building of some national organisations appears to have been limited. Finally, the “management architecture” currently in place has facilitated service provision and the camp running but is not well structured to support Mbera's transition to a permanent urban-like settlement (or similar scenarios)¹²³, as considered by UNHCR¹²⁴.

UNHCR's multi-sector strategy for the area is fully in line with the Local Development Plan (LDP) for Mbera, drawn up in 2020¹²⁵. On the other hand, while aiming for the economic and social development of the area (four municipalities involved), as well as social cohesion between the refugee populations and the host communities, the LDP explicitly mentions that there has not been a consensual vision for the long-term future of the camp. Nor was the idea of urbanising the camp expressed by the authorities during the field phase, either at local or central level. UNHCR's actions were programmed and implemented on a sectoral basis (e.g. water and sanitation, electrification, health,

¹²¹ FGs carried out during the field phase, UNHCR surveys including Participatory Evaluation in urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou), July 2022 and Participatory Evaluation conducted using the AGD approach in Mbera, Bassikounou and Fassala, July 2022.

¹²² CARI classification into 6 groups with the WFP, then in 2020, into three groups with criteria close to the Mauritanian Social Register.

¹²³ Internal and external interviews, FGD

¹²⁴ See SQ2.2 and SQ4.1

¹²⁵ [Strategic axes of the Mbera LDP, December 2020](#): Axis 1. Protect the rights of refugees, including new arrivals, while strengthening protection mechanisms, with particular attention to women, children and people with special needs / Axis 2. Strengthen local value chains and industries that create economic opportunities, and develop skills, employability, employment and entrepreneurship / Priority 3. Promote sustainable, shared and equitable use of environmental resources, encouraging the use of clean energy and green jobs / Priority 4. Strengthen infrastructure to support regional productivity and improve the coverage and quality of basic services / Priority 5. Contribute to the macro-economic development of the moughataa and ensure the long-term viability of the camp's humanitarian infrastructure and services, and encourage the technical services of the state, local authorities and communities to take ownership of them / Priority 6. Strengthen disaster and conflict preparedness and response mechanisms.

education), but without a holistic plan for the development of the Mbera urban-like settlement, integrated into the wider regional development plan. It has to be said that the Mbera LDP relies heavily on international actors support for its implementation.

In Mbera, there is a contrast between the refugees' desire for more support to become self-sufficient and the perception conveyed by some stakeholders of a "relationship of dependence" with UNHCR, which inspires security and protection and, therefore, does not encourage refugees to seek other alternatives. According to the survey carried out in Mbera for the inclusion in the social register, more than half of the refugee population is extremely vulnerable¹²⁶ (53% of households¹²⁷) and only 4% of households are considered less vulnerable. This situation clearly justified the continuity of assistance for basic needs, particularly for Persons with Specific Needs (PSN), but also the gradual development undertaken to promote the inclusion - in all its aspects - and the self-reliance of Mbera population. The marked increase in UNHCR's budget allocated to cash assistance (CBI) to increase the scope of the financial assistance for refugees in Bassikonou area¹²⁸ and the start-up of IGAs through projects with a development approach illustrate this new dynamic¹²⁹. The socio-economic profiling of refugee households in the Mbera camp¹³⁰ carried out in 2017 (four population groups) also showed that 55% of the camp's population was poor or very poor (in both cases reducing meals as a coping strategy). This shows that, even if the survey methodology was not the same, the situation has not changed significantly over these 4 years.

Q2. In terms of **effectiveness**, what have been the results (intentional and unintentional) in the areas of assistance, protection and solutions?

Against a backdrop of increasing arrivals from Mali (2022) and mixed movements, UNHCR has created opportunities for technical work and dialogue with the main public authorities at both central and decentralised levels, thanks to the GoM's involvement, institutional confidence in its mandate, sustained technical and operational capacity, and an extended territorial presence. The GoM's international commitments and the determination of the institutions supported by UNHCR have made a decisive contribution to allowing access to the territory, respecting the principle of non-refoulement, allowing freedom of movement, facilitating access to documentation, formalising the "temporary" role of UNHCR in the registration and management of the RSD procedure and making progress in the inclusion of refugees (among other things). Nevertheless, difficulties persist in making progress on other key protection-related issues (e.g. asylum law, ANRPTS capacities,

¹²⁶ Dimensions considered: education, dependency, health and special needs, work capacity and access to food.

¹²⁷ Which correspond to 62% of individuals

¹²⁸ Despite the increase in UNHCR's budget, the average amount per CBI recipient has decreased, which has raised the concerns among the refugee population mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

¹²⁹ See Q2 and SQ4.1.

¹³⁰ ACF and CSA. UNHCR and WFP, EU project.

registration in remote areas, access to people following disembarkations in Nouadhibou and identification of people with international protection needs).

At the operational level, UNHCR has promoted the community-based approach to protection to encourage empowerment and accountability, particularly of women, who have played an important role in issues such as people with special needs, child protection and GBV. Existing community structures in Mbera supported by UNHCR have been sensitised and have played a key role in managing camp affairs and providing essential services on a voluntary basis. However, the issue of volunteering poses the challenge of sustainability and, a dozen years after the creation of the camp, reveals a grey area between what should be voluntary and what should be "professionalised" services.

In the area of child protection, UNHCR has helped to facilitate access to civil registration and has promoted awareness-raising, particularly among community leaders, although progress is still limited. In education, integration into the national education system has been effective in urban areas, in contrast to the situation in Mbera; in the camp, the available indicators show a persistent critical situation. The lack of resources has also prevented a protective response to refugee children in isolated rural areas or exposed to other risks of exploitation in urban contexts.

In terms of GBV, the national institutional and legal context and the persistence of socio-cultural practices within refugee and host communities have made it difficult to address these issues. Despite this, UNHCR has managed to implement awareness-raising activities for the LGBTIQ+ population in Nouadhibou, and support services (e.g. "protection desk", "helplines"). Overall, UNHCR and its partners have responded to cases of GBV by networking with international and national organisations, including the Ministry for Social Affairs, Children and the Family (MASEF); however, the results are highly dependent on coordinated and complementary work between the players involved.

The transfer of health services from Mbera to the Ministry of Health (as part of the WB's INAYA project) has been effective in terms of management and the provision of care by structures and professionals in the national health system, but not yet in terms of funding. INAYA's contribution to improving the availability and quality of care in Mbera has been well documented, but the full integration of services in Mbera into the national health system, and the maintenance of funding, the gains achieved and the quality of care over time remain a challenge.

In a context of still limited access to public services, UNHCR's cash assistance interventions since 2018 have expanded to strengthen resilience and social cohesion. The main area of cash assistance has been multi-use cash to meet the needs of People with Special Needs (PBS) - MPCGs and the priority has been clearly focused on refugees in Bassikounou (Mbera and surrounding areas) and, to a lesser extent, host populations. The CBIs have made it possible to meet basic needs in the Mbera camp and, in urban contexts, to cover mainly education needs.

However, the data available was insufficient to assess the extent to which they had helped to improve the refugees' living conditions beyond humanitarian assistance.

Between 2019 and 2022, a national context of economic crisis offered few opportunities for empowerment for the people with and for whom UNHCR works. Nevertheless, UNHCR has become one of the most advanced operations in terms of HDP nexus engagement and inclusion in the region. UNHCR has had a clear catalytic effect within the HDP nexus with Mauritania's eligibility for WB IDA-RSW funds, the inclusion of refugees in the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the HC region in the UNCT convergence zones. The role of UNHCR, in conjunction with the WB and other development donors, has been instrumental in implementing social, economic and financial inclusion measures, while at the same time strengthening certain national services. The integration of refugees into the national social protection and health system, activities to promote self-sufficiency and employability, and the involvement of the banking sector are just a few examples. However, the inclusion process is still in its infancy and faces barriers on which UNHCR can only have a limited impact. More specifically, there is experience of productive IGAs, which seem to play an important role in this empowerment, and some value chains are beginning to perform well, despite contextual and internal challenges. However, during this period, when there were no IGAs for urban refugees, the scattered nature of the data makes it difficult to get a clear picture of their effectiveness.

In terms of social cohesion, this is a relatively exceptional context, where collective efforts - local, international and refugee - in Mbera and neighbouring villages have succeeded in maintaining generally good coexistence between the two communities, but in an area with limited resources and exposed to the effects of climate change, the balance has been fragile. The feeling that the refugee population has benefited from more investment and attention than the local population has been predominant among local authorities and communities, despite UNHCR's efforts to include both communities.

UNHCR has been involved in coordinating and implementing development actions in the Mbera camp and surrounding localities, but has not had a comprehensive approach agreed with the authorities on the territorial development of the Bassikounou moughataa. The various sectoral studies have been relevant and necessary for planning certain improvements in the Mbera camp, but they have not been encompassed in an integral vision for prioritising interventions and ensuring equity in territorial development.

In addition, the development of data and studies on the refugee population has been fundamental in guiding the interventions and strategies of the organisation itself and of national and international organisations. In the case of the Mbera camp, despite regular efforts to obtain up-to-date data, there was a certain dissatisfaction with the information available on the activities carried out, the level of knowledge about the socio-economic profile of the population and the dynamics of "pendular

movements". Data on the urban refugee population is scarce, which has limited the precision and targeting of UNHCR's interventions.

In recent years, UNHCR has gradually strengthened its planning, monitoring and analysis tools. The documents consulted show adequate disaggregation by age and gender but, to a lesser extent, by specific vulnerabilities and linguistic minorities. The many thematic or sectoral studies and surveys carried out have made it possible to monitor specific needs in different contexts (urban, Mbera) and at different times (pandemic).

SQ2.1. How **effective** have the various UNHCR interventions been (in terms of international protection and asylum, humanitarian assistance and basic needs, inclusion and solutions, and national capacity building and resilience)?

Impact Area 1: Attaining favourable protection environments

International protection and asylum

Over the past three years, UNHCR has succeeded in expanding the legal framework and access to international protection through advocacy, technical assistance and management of the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure in a very favourable political and socio-cultural environment, despite the lack of progress in adopting the national asylum law. The right to asylum is applied "de facto", even if there is no law on asylum¹³¹. UNHCR efforts broadened the protection space and the inclusion of refugees into national policies and programs through a technical and operational approach. This was coupled with advocacy efforts to advance the national asylum law through political and institutional channels, although no notable progress was achieved in this regard. UNHCR's endeavours were carried out against the backdrop of escalating arrivals from Mali, such as 2,222 arrivals in 2021 and a substantial surge to 12,051 arrivals in 2022. The year 2022 also witnessed a remarkable increase (+400%¹³²) in the number of registered refugees in Mbera due to the deepening conflict in Mali, in addition to the sustained presence of mixed movements, predominantly along the Atlantic coast.

Main achievements

The GoM's commitments, reflecting the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018¹³³ (GCR) and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness¹³⁴ (2019), have resulted in legislative changes and operational agreements with UNHCR that led to significant progress for people with and for whom UNHCR works during the period assessed, as follows:

¹³¹ ERG Workshop

¹³² UNHCR Dashboards indicate that 4,142 individuals were registered in 2021, and 20,770 individuals were registered in 2022 in Mbera.

¹³³ Pledges at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019: to adopt national asylum legislation, allow access of refugees to the labour market, include refugees in the national health system and issue birth certificates to all refugee children born in Mauritania.

¹³⁴ Mauritania pledged to provide birth certificates for all children born in Mauritania, ensure access to state-issued civil registration and documentation to all refugees and to ratify the 1961 Convention on the Prevention of Statelessness within the following five years.

- Access to the territory for the Malian population, even during the closure of borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite a few cases, reported by the people with and for whom UNHCR works, of access being refused due to a lack of identity documents.
- Access to civil documents for refugees in the Mbera camp and urban refugees through the ANRPTS (Decree 1128 of 2020). This is an essential intervention supported by UNHCR to operationalise protection, as it is a key mechanism for providing identification, reducing the risk of statelessness, contributing to the enjoyment of rights and facilitating access to public services for people with and for whom UNHCR works. By the end of 2022, 65% of the refugee population had a national identity number (NIN)^{135,136}. However, UNHCR data indicates that NIN coverage in the Mbera camp is significantly higher (71%) than in urban areas (25%)¹³⁷.
- The favourable political and legal context have enabled, for example, an increase from 5,520 to 69,149 people with and for whom UNHCR works supported to access civil registration or documentation (2020 - 2021) and the registration of 10,184 people individually with a minimum data set for the first time in urban contexts (2021)¹³⁸.
- The formalisation of UNHCR's "temporary" role in the registration and management of the Refugee Status Determination (RSD), based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Home Office, February 2022. This agreement also made it possible to widen access to the RSD procedure for urban refugees (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou). In fact, the increase in refugee registration in absolute numbers was concentrated in Mbera due to the large influx of arrivals during 2022 (+15,000 people), but the largest percentage increases occurred in the two cities (Nouadhibou with +50% and Nouakchott with +43%) during 2022, as shown in Figure 07 below.
- Between 2020 and 2022, UNHCR has implemented differentiated RSD procedures (merged, simplified, accelerated, regular) in order to respond to the continuing increase in arrivals, to adapt its response to the different local realities (prima facie in Mbera, other procedures for urban refugees, mixed movements in Nouadhibou) and to reduce waiting times between pre-registration, registration and first instance or backlog¹³⁹.

¹³⁵ UNHCR Theory of Change Workshop Nouakchott, 9 March 2023, Situation Analysis.

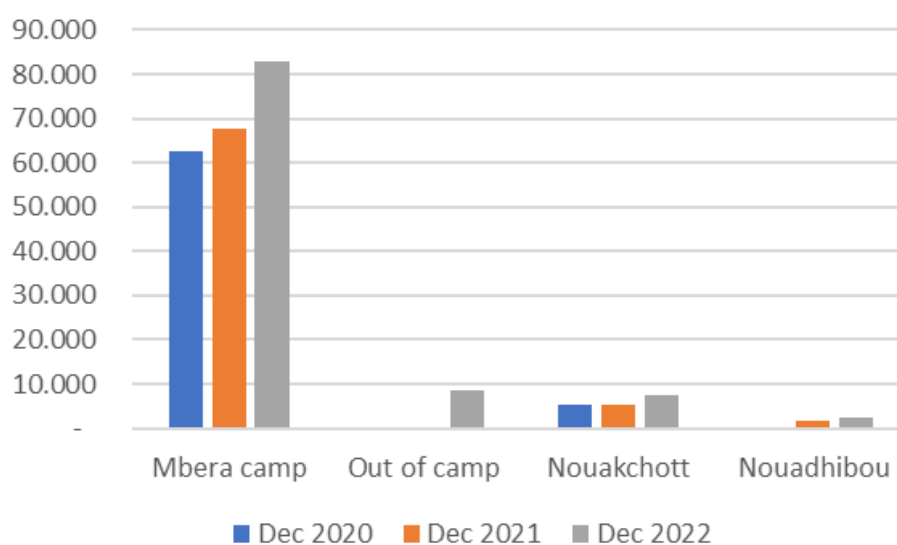
¹³⁶ The methodologies and sources for civil status statistics are not comparable. According to available ANRPTS statistics, the national coverage rate for civil documentation exceeds 85% of the population (source: Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018-2022, United Nations and Islamic Republic of Mauritania, p 25). Nationally, the percentage of children under the age of 5 whose births have been registered was 65% (Islamic Republic of Mauritania et al, "Stratégie nationale de protection des enfants - SNPE 2022-2025", 11), while in Guidimakha and Hodh Chargui, this rate was 27% in 2021 (UNICEF, Rapport d'analyse de l'enquête de base du programme "Construire la Résilience au Sahel, Mauritanie, 94).

¹³⁷ UNHCR Situation analysis 2023; ToC workshop, Nouakchott

¹³⁸ # of people with and for whom UNHCR works assisted with civil registration or documentation; # of people with and for whom UNHCR works registered on an individual basis with the minimum data set required - UNHCR monitoring system / OP20-21_S-22.xlsx).

¹³⁹ Interim strategy report.pdf (UNHCR).

FIGURE 07. Registered refugees by location (Dec 2020 - Dec 2022).



Source: UNHCR Dashboards, end-of-year reports, <https://reporting.unhcr.org>

- In a context of mixed movements, UNHCR's efforts to consolidate institutional relations, raise awareness and train officials, and introduce changes, tools and protocols in consultation with the institutions (e.g. merged procedure, biometric registration) have made it possible in Nouakchott (until 2022) and Nouadhibou to access detention centres, carry out the screening and registration of returnees and avoid or reduce cases of refoulement. In 2022, 101 people with and for whom UNHCR works were identified during 34 visits to detention centres in the two cities¹⁴⁰, although the lack of information concerning disembarkations/arrests in Nouakchott has not made it possible to intervene recently.
- The extension of UNHCR's territorial presence in the wilaya of Hodh El Chargui (Néma) to strengthen registration and access to rights and services for Malian refugees in rural areas, and in Nouadhibou in 2019 to meet the needs arising from mixed movements.
- Changes to legislation on access to nationality have reduced the risk of statelessness (2021). To mitigate the risk of statelessness, particular attention has been paid to documentation and, as a result, more than 300 suppletive judgements have been handed down by the courts of Bassikounou, Nouadhibou and Nouakchott to serve as a basis for issuing documents to stateless persons or persons at risk. In 2021, 25 people received documents, and in 2022 (up to September) 56 returnees out of 134 cases identified, thanks to joint work between UNHCR, its partner Insanyia and the Government. In addition, technical work with the courts has strengthened the legal protection of people who have committed crimes in order to prevent their deportation.

UNHCR effectively established platforms for technical collaboration and dialogue with key government bodies at both central and decentralized tiers (such as MIDEK, ANRPTS, wilayas). This achievement was facilitated by the solid trust in its mandate, an unwavering operational capacity, and an extensive territorial reach (Nouadhibou, Néma).

¹⁴⁰ 2_Annual-Results-Report.pdf (UNHCR).

Furthermore, UNHCR achieved a significant milestone by expanding the scope of international protection within a mixed movements context, as well as successfully forging institutional and technical relations with the General Directorate of National Security.

In addition to an institutional environment favourable to international protection, the reception of Malian refugees in Mauritania has been encouraged by social and religious proximity and pre-existing family and commercial links between the two countries ("they are our brothers"¹⁴¹). Socio-cultural factors have been particularly decisive in the Bassikounou moughataa, as they have enabled a steady flow of Malian refugees to be received for over a decade in an area subject to growing demographic pressure and a scarcity of natural resources and livelihoods¹⁴².

The community-based protection (CBP) actions¹⁴³ have helped to develop and consolidate mechanisms for participation and interaction with the refugee population in Mbera (e.g. annual accountability exercises, refugee associations, setting up community feedback mechanisms, community mobilisation during the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to the arrival of new refugees). They have also facilitated proximity to prevent and respond to the identification of risks (e.g. GBV, child protection). UNHCR's work in CBP in Mbera has been facilitated by the existence of community mechanisms for decision-making and management of camp affairs. In this context, representation, participation, and decision-making by the refugee population at Mbera (with a gender-sensitive and minority-inclusive approach) have significantly evolved and stand at an exceptional level compared to other refugee camps¹⁴⁴.

Challenges encountered

Technical assistance and institutional dialogue between UNHCR and the National Consultative Commission for Refugees (CNCR), which led to the drafting of the national asylum law in 2014, have not continued to date. The election period, scheduled for 2023 and 2024, is likely to continue to make it difficult to progress the draft law, which will also need to be updated to reflect the GoM's new international commitments. The introduction of this law would be an essential building block in the further development of a national asylum system.

With regard to civil status documents and despite UNHCR's efforts to improve access to civil registration, the implementation of the GoM commitments has been hampered by the limited capacity of the ANRPTS (in terms of human, technological and operational resources¹⁴⁵), the administrative requirements of the application¹⁴⁶ and the limited awareness of people with and for whom UNHCR works on the importance of civil documentation¹⁴⁷. For example, at the end of 2022, 35% of the refugee population did

¹⁴¹ Expression repeated in numerous interviews with external informants.

¹⁴² See SQ2.2.

¹⁴³ CBP: Community-based protection.

¹⁴⁴ Internal interviews (UNHCR)

¹⁴⁵ ANRPTS information system deficient, limited application processing capacity, poor internet and electricity connections in Bassikounou, etc.

¹⁴⁶ Example: registration of both parents as refugees, supplementary judgments.

¹⁴⁷ For example: births outside health facilities, loss of documents, lack of awareness of the importance of the birth certificate. (UNHCR Theory of Change Workshop Nouakchott, 9 March 2023, Situation Analysis).

not have a national identity card and only 4% had a refugee identification card. In 2022, the ANRPTS issued only 527 identity cards out of a total of 7,745 applications, and no birth certificates were issued (which increased the risk of statelessness)¹⁴⁸.

The continued increase in asylum applications and registration (due to the steady flow of arrivals from Mali), coupled with UNHCR resource constraints and the limited capacity of ANRPTS, has led to an increase in the backlog, despite the operation's efforts to reduce it (including the database review, which reduced the backlog from 7,000 to 3,500 cases by December 2022).

The existence of different RSD procedures for the Malian population, depending on their place of residence (prima facie in Mbera, merged or simplified procedure in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou) has led to a wide variety of situations, which adds a degree of complexity to management. In addition, the high mobility of the Malian refugee population in the country has added further complexity to the management of the various procedures and registration (e.g. Malians eligible for resettlement who have to go through a new procedure).

It has not been possible to register Malian refugees living in rural or isolated localities (both within the HC and in other localities - Kiffa, Aleg, Chami) and to monitor flows at border crossing points (e.g. PK 55 of the border with Western Sahara) due to resource constraints, despite some mobile brigades and needs identification activities were carried out by UNHCR during 2021 and 2022.

In terms of CBP, and in parallel with the achievements mentioned above, CBP interventions implemented in Mbera and Bassikounou have encountered difficulties (socio-cultural barriers, resources) in reinforcing prevention and response to certain protection risks and social cohesion between Mbera and neighbouring communities (in a situation of fragile social cohesion). In urban areas, CBP actions have mainly focused on identifying specific vulnerabilities. In Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, where the profiling and knowledge of the urban refugee population is more limited, UNHCR has strengthened CBP by signing a new partnership agreement in 2022, but little information has been available.

Impact Area 2: Implementing fundamental rights in safe environments

Well-being and essential needs

UNHCR's actions to address essential needs have been fundamental to avoid exposure to the risks of exploitation and the adoption of negative coping mechanisms. With this in mind and to strengthen resilience and social cohesion, since 2018 UNHCR's cash-based interventions have been expanded¹⁴⁹ ("monetisation") to the detriment of in-kind donations.

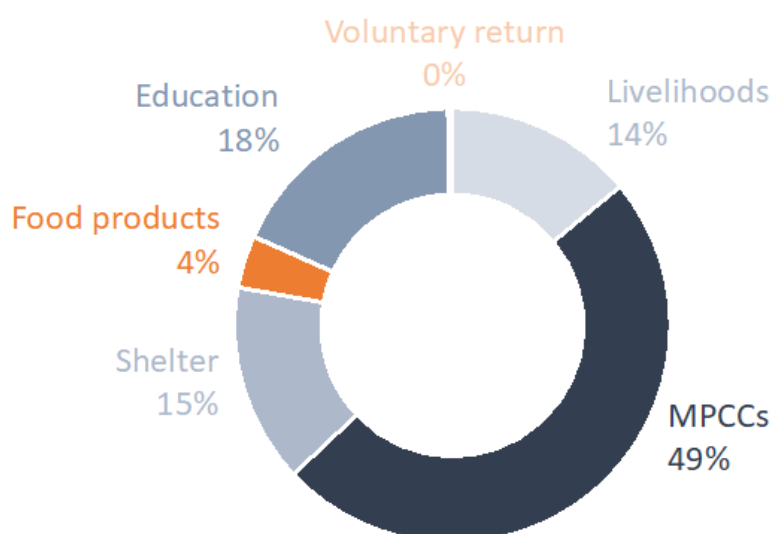
¹⁴⁸ See footnote 142.

¹⁴⁹ UNHCR policy on cash interventions for the period 2022-2026.

To optimise efforts, UNHCR is part of the cash coordination platforms¹⁵⁰ and has been able to put in place adequate processes and tools. However, the post-distribution monitoring (PDM¹⁵¹) system is still in the process of being structured and consolidated.

Between 2020 and 2022, the main component of CBIs was multipurpose cash grants (MPCG¹⁵²), to meet the needs of PSN, which accounts for 49% of the funds allocated to CBIs. This was followed by the Education, Shelter and Livelihood sectors with 18%, 15% and 14% respectively of the total funds allocated to CBI.

FIGURE 08. Weight (%) of funds allocated by CBI sector, 2020-2022.



Source: CBI Programme 2020_2022_Summary.

The CBI's have clearly focused on the refugees in Bassikounou (Mbera and surrounding area). They have benefited the most from the growth in the CBI budget, with an increase of around +286% over the period 2020-2022 (62% of all CBI funds distributed).

There are clear differences between population groups in terms of allocation of CBIs by sector. There is a clear difference between the three population groups in terms of the importance of the sectors. For the Bassikounou refugees, multi-purpose cash (MPCG) represents the largest share - 64% for the period 2022 - 2022 -, with a sharp increase, particularly in 2021 (+171%)¹⁵³, due to the monetisation of aid that was previously distributed in kind. Shelter comes second (24% over the period) with a very significant increase in 2022 (+519%) which could be explained by the need for repairs in many of the dwellings dating from the first years of the camp's creation, in addition to the needs of the new arrivals. Specific aid for food products - assistance normally provided by the

¹⁵⁰ UNHCR is an active member of the Cash Working Group (CWG) in Mauritania.

¹⁵¹ Post-distribution monitoring.

¹⁵² MPCG: Multipurpose cash grant.

¹⁵³ This strong growth is due to the monetisation of hygiene kits (USD 645,619), previously provided in kind, and the introduction of socio-economic cash in response to C19 (USD 430,459). Ref. Annex 18 Expenditure and number of CBI beneficiaries by POC, Objective, Activities; 2021.

WFP – was only provided in 2021, in a small proportion, due to the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis. The host populations of Bassikounou received cash for multiple uses in a smaller proportion (23% over the period), but they also received cash for food products in 2021 to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, urban refugees receive the majority of cash for education, and multiple-use cash represents only 26%, with a gradual decline over the period.

The PDM surveys¹⁵⁴ show that beneficiaries appreciate the assistance, with a preference for the MPCG. Nevertheless, the reduction in the amounts per beneficiary of the CBI MPCG, in view of the high cost of basic products, and the distribution according to categorisation based on vulnerability, are among the main dissatisfactions and misunderstandings of the refugees in Mbera. Refugees' main concerns include underweight children and debt to meet basic needs (mainly young women and women over 60). So the CBI is useful for the people who receive it - the aim is to provide assistance and promote social cohesion - and it has helped to create a flow of money in and around the camp, but it does not seem to be enough to meet the basic needs of the most vulnerable people¹⁵⁵.

However, the data available limited a comprehensive analysis of CBI interventions and the evaluation was unable to determine the extent to which the use of CBI has improved protection outcomes, facilitated inclusion and solutions, and contributed to programme effectiveness^{156,157}. The limitations encountered are the impossibility of identifying and reconstructing all cash-based interventions in terms of (i) planned budget and budget execution (OP and OL), (ii) targets for performance indicators (OP and OL) and the extent to which they have been achieved, and (iii) the modality of implementation (through partners or UNHCR).

Housing and sustainable facilities

UNHCR's proposals during the period 2020 - 2022 are based on the possibility of building permanent infrastructure and homes, whether using local or non-local materials¹⁵⁸. This approach, which is a priority given the state of "temporary" constructions after a dozen years, would be feasible if the land tenure system and agreements with authorities made it possible to establish temporary concessions of use (or similar options), offering guarantees with a view to permanent construction¹⁵⁹. The willingness and ability to get involved in improving the quality of construction was clearly conveyed during interviews and FGs with Mbera camp's representatives.

¹⁵⁴Two PDM in 2021 and five in 2022.

¹⁵⁵ See SQ2.2.

¹⁵⁶ UNHCR policy on cash interventions for the period 2022-2026.

¹⁵⁷ It should be noted that a technical and in-depth evaluation of CBI interventions (or other programmes) is not included in the scope of the "Country Strategy Evaluations".

¹⁵⁸ Shelter and Settlement Review & Medium-Term Development Options for M'Bera Settlement. UNHCR 2017.

¹⁵⁹ The Ministry of Finance is currently considering reforming the land and cadastral system, aware that it is dysfunctional. Unfortunately, institutional and legal obstacles are preventing progress on this reform. For example, in the urban environment of Nouakchott, there has been a delay of more than 20 years in granting final land titles. The result is legal uncertainty and a lack of land clarity for the Mauritanian population.

In the absence of clarity on the land situation and the position of the authorities, UNHCR has continued to provide aid, particularly through the CBI or in kind for the PSN, to help new arrivals settle in and to repair older accommodation.

In addition, the situation regarding the simultaneous implementation of the two WB infrastructure development projects¹⁶⁰, which could contribute to the urban articulation of the Mbera camp, is not precisely known.

Clean water, sanitation and hygiene

UNHCR and Action contre la Faim (ACF – Action Against Hunger) have undertaken major investments to improve the efficiency of the camp's water supply and sanitation system¹⁶¹. As part of these improvements, two large water towers have been built and new pipe systems have been installed¹⁶². The Refugee Volunteers for Camp Cleanliness associations provide support and carry out maintenance work on the camp's water supply network and septic tank emptying. At the same time, emergency sanitation facilities have been replaced and communal toilets have been built. However, the continuing influx of refugees is beginning to put pressure on the existing system.

It should also be noted that for refugees who settle outside the camp, particularly those with livestock, access to water depends on agreements with local communities, and sanitation is not controlled. Through the ProNexus project, UNHCR has identified locations and points of tension over water to guide Water, Sanitation and Hygiene interventions outside the camp.

In addition, the second component of the IDA¹⁶³ project is aimed at refugees and host communities¹⁶⁴. The project stipulates that water supply costs will be borne by the final users (including households, healthcare facilities, farmers, and businesses), suggesting a cost recovery mechanism. Concerning refugees, the payment for water supply and consumption at household level will be introduced gradually. As of now, a clear management system for the water supply and sanitation services has not been determined; under these circumstances, determining the refugees' ability to pay for water and sanitation services and, on the other hand, setting up a water and sanitation system in a transitioning camp of temporary accommodation with no urban development plan, seem to present substantial challenges which have not been clearly addressed so far.

Gender-based violence

The national institutional and legal context and the persistence of socio-cultural practices within refugee and host communities have been unfavourable¹⁶⁵ to the implementation

¹⁶⁰ MOUDOUN project to support decentralisation and the development of resilient and productive intermediate towns which includes a sub-component focusing on economic development and another on electrification of the camp, and the Water and Sanitation Sector Project.

¹⁶¹ The camp was initially built on an emergency basis by various partners.

¹⁶² Operations Plan Mauritania 2021. Mauritania End Year 2021, UNHCR.

¹⁶³ Regular IDA funds are contributing USD 30 million, the government USD 5 million and the RSW (IDA 18 Refugee Sub-Window) USD 14 million.

¹⁶⁴ Mission Report UNHCR Division of Resilience and Solutions Support mission Mauritania 20-31 January 2020.

¹⁶⁵ E.g.: the absence of a law on GBV, the criminalisation of homosexuality (Civil Code, art. 308), taboos and concealment of domestic violence, child marriage.

of a comprehensive and sustained strategy to respond to GBV. Despite the existence of a National Strategy to Combat GBV since 2012, public legal and social services (e.g: judicial police, civil affairs judge, public prosecutor, minors' police brigade, MASEF) and civil society initiatives (e.g. *Association Mauritanienne des Droits de l'Homme*), are scarce and gaps have been reported in terms of adequate and comprehensive care provision for survivors of GBV. In particular, protection actions addressing the LGBTIQ+ population have been limited by this unfavourable national legal framework prohibiting homosexuality and, consequently, LGBTIQ+ community constituted a group exposed to a high degree of vulnerability. In Nouadhibou, UNHCR has implemented awareness-raising actions and created a support group for the LGBTIQ+ population. In Nouakchott, UNHCR has promoted "teatime" meetings and individual support sessions. Protection desks, help lines and exceptional financial assistance were also available to the LGBTIQ+ community.

In the Mbera camp, the main risks and violence reported were early and forced marriages, unintended pregnancies and rape, which accounted for 42% of the 219 cases of survivors identified and verified in 2020¹⁶⁶. Between 2019 and 2020, UNHCR reports an increase in the number of cases of GBV identified (from 255 to 295 cases)¹⁶⁷ but in 2021 and 2022, there appears to be a decrease in the number of cases¹⁶⁸, although the same causes remain. In urban areas, 28 cases were detected in Nouakchott and 11 in Nouadhibou in 2022¹⁶⁹. It is important to note that, in general, the available monitoring indicators show modest numbers of cases and assistance provided to survivors of GBV (e.g. in 2021, only 6 cases of sexual and gender-based violence in Mbera received legal assistance)¹⁷⁰, which probably does not reflect the scale and intensity of the phenomenon. According to several informants and reports¹⁷¹, there is significant under-reporting because socio-cultural practices, taboos and intra-community mechanisms often hide cases of GBV and other forms of violence.

UNHCR's response to cases of GBV has been structured through networking with international and national organisations, including MASEF, and coordinated by the GBV working group. In 2022, UNHCR signed an agreement with a new partner (AFCF), which has enabled a better understanding of needs and a stronger response to cases of GBV

¹⁶⁶ STC annual reports.

¹⁶⁷ UNHCR 2020 end of year report.

¹⁶⁸ Save the Children annual reports.

¹⁶⁹ In the Assaba, Guidimakha and Hodh Chargui regions, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage are among the most common forms of GBV. Across the three regions, around one in four women aged 15-49 (24%) in the intervention zone had married before the age of 15, and more than three in seven women aged 20-49 (47%) had married before the age of 18. In addition, 92% of women and girls have undergone FGM. Sexual violence (against both male and female victims), the rape of slave women and girls, and domestic violence are also among the forms of GBV present in the two regions (UNICEF, Rapport d'analyse de l'enquête de base du programme " Construire la Résilience au Sahel, Mauritanie). At national level, girls continue to suffer various forms of violence. According to the results of the MICS 2015, 35.2% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 16.5% before the age of 15. This rate is higher in rural areas (19.9% before the age of 15 and 41.5% before the age of 18). The overall prevalence rate of GBV is 68.1%, including all forms of violence (physical, sexual and psychological). FGM remains a widespread practice: 53% of girls aged 0-14 and 62% of girls aged 15-19 have undergone at least one form of FGM, with the highest rates recorded among the poorest (90% in the lowest quintile). (ENVEF 2011, cited in PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, United Nations and Islamic Republic of Mauritania).2018-2022.

¹⁷⁰ Monitoring indicators UNHCR (# of reported sexual and gender-based violence incidents for which survivors receive legal assistance).

¹⁷¹ UNHCR end year reports, interviews.

in urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou). The networking structured around the inter-agency coordination mechanism on Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), has helped to ensure community awareness and prevention, case management (by updating SOPs) and the availability of a wide range of services (e.g. medical, psychosocial¹⁷², legal, financial and physical protection assistance) both in the Mbera camp and in urban areas¹⁷³.

However, constraints have been identified in ensuring a specialised level of psychosocial care¹⁷⁴. In fact, the response to cases of GBV has relied heavily on coordinated and complementary work between the network of international and national organisations in a context of a critical shortage of specialised public services, which generates uncertainties about its sustainability.

Child protection

The child protection response was implemented in partnership with MASEF, as the public administration responsible for the national policy on childhood and, in Bassikounou, as the lead institution of the child protection working group. UNHCR's work with MASEF has promoted the inclusion of refugee children in the national child protection system, in line with the National Strategy for Children 2019 - 2030. UNHCR coordinated work with other international and national organisations (UNICEF, Save The Children, Médicos del Mundo, ALPD, AFCF).

The GoM's international commitments facilitated the signing of an agreement between UNHCR and ANRPTS to provide birth certificates to all refugee children born in Mauritania and reduce the risk of statelessness. Some progress has been made in implementing the agreement with ANRPTS, but there are still many difficulties (see next paragraph). The progress made in recent years includes the following:

- UNHCR's contribution to the revision of the SOP¹⁷⁵ for case management and the training of professionals from various international and national organisations on the best interests of the child. In 2021, UNHCR carried out 169 best interest assessments and assisted 104 critical cases¹⁷⁶.
- In the Mbera camp, UNHCR has supported the creation of a child protection centre, the provision of essential health services (which has ensured high vaccination rates) and nutrition (in collaboration with UNICEF and WFP).
- In addition, UNHCR has carried out numerous awareness-raising and training activities for organisations working in the Mbera camp and refugee associations, which have helped to raise awareness of the negative effects of certain socio-cultural practices and beliefs. Over the three years, UNHCR actions covered the Mbera camp and a dozen neighbouring localities in various modalities (face-to-face, FM radio, social networks). The target audiences were village committees, conflict management

¹⁷² French Red Cross annual report 2022.

¹⁷³ The GBV management system is part of the multi-sectoral platforms to combat gender-based violence piloted by the MASEF (with support from the UNFPA, UNICEF and other agencies); in Bassikounou, the platform was launched by the MASEF in 2019.

¹⁷⁴ UNHCR end year report 2021.

¹⁷⁵ SOP: standard operating procedure

¹⁷⁶ 2022 UNHCR Annual results report, interim.

committees, women's clubs, town halls and other local authorities, as well as the organisations members of the working groups (protection, children).

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR's research about the effect of the pandemic on the socio-economic and protection conditions of refugee households in the Mbera camp¹⁷⁷ highlighted a rise in stress levels and a decline in living conditions for families. Consequently, this deterioration led to an increase in risks of GBV and for children. However, this situation was not reflected in the monitoring indicators and case management mechanisms, which may suggest under-reporting¹⁷⁸. Despite the partial evidence available and the lack of quantitative data, greater awareness and, apparently, a decrease in early marriage, child labour and female genital mutilation in recent years in the camp was mentioned during the evaluation¹⁷⁹.

Despite some progress, critical gaps remain in child protection, mainly due to systemic barriers (e.g. limited availability of national social services specialising in children, limited capacity of ANRPTS) and socio-cultural barriers (e.g. child labour practices, early marriage, female genital mutilation, girls dropping out of school). The identification of risks for refugee children in urban areas and in the context of mixed movements seems to have been less documented.

In the area of access to civil documentation, refugee children have a very low civil registration rate (27% in 2022) and are therefore exposed to the risk of statelessness¹⁸⁰. In the field of education, low school enrolment and dropout rates have posed additional risks for the child population, particularly in the Mbera camp¹⁸¹.

In addition to the risks associated with the lack of birth registration and civil status documents, there are risks associated with exploitation and violence in various forms. Although the available monitoring indicators are heterogeneous, the main risks and violence forms are early and forced marriage, unintended pregnancy and rape¹⁸².

In Mbera, the number of cases of children in need of protection fell from 331 (59% girls, 41% boys) in 2021 to 86 cases (44% girls, 56% boys) in 2022¹⁸³. Although it was not possible to reconstruct a trend in the quantitative indicators, the evaluation documented the increasing awareness of community leaders about children's rights and GBV, as well as the perception among key informants of an improved child protection environment in the Mbera camp¹⁸⁴.

The lack of resources has also prevented a protection response to refugee children in isolated rural areas and in urban contexts, children exposed to other risks of exploitation

¹⁷⁷ Results of a sampling survey on the impact of COVID 19 on the socio economic and protection situation of refugees in the Mbera refugee camp. UNHCR Mauritania. July 2020.

¹⁷⁸ A number of informants and reports mention the socio-cultural practices and taboos surrounding domestic violence, as well as the difficulties in understanding the phenomenon and taking comprehensive action.

¹⁷⁹ External interviews, FGD.

¹⁸⁰ 2022 UNHCR Annual results report, interim.

¹⁸¹ At national level, the net primary school enrolment rate in 2019 was 78% for girls and 74% for boys Ministry of National Education; quoted in: Evaluation of the WFP Country Strategic Plan in Mauritania 2019-2023.

¹⁸² See section on GBV.

¹⁸³ STC annual reports.

¹⁸⁴ External informant interviews, FG

(e.g. labour exploitation, begging) or due to factors of vulnerability (e.g. disability, mental health).

Healthy living

The analysis carried out shows that, during the period under evaluation, UNHCR's actions to promote access to healthcare for refugees were in line with government policies, in particular the National Health Policy for 2030, which are defined in accordance with the World Health Organisation's (WHO) global recommendations¹⁸⁵.

The results achieved in the area of health are positive overall; the period 2020 – 2022, reflects the consolidation of previous efforts (partnership UNHCR – MSF¹⁸⁶) to guarantee refugees' access to quality health care in Mbera. In fact, in 2020 the (partial) hand-over of health care provision in Mbera camp to the national health system began, as part of the implementation of the INAYA project¹⁸⁷, with the adoption of a roadmap by the joint committee made up of the Ministry of Health, the WB and UNHCR. During the evaluated period, the diverse initiatives carried out by UNHCR in the HC region have achieved the following outcomes:

- Enhanced the capacity of health facilities in terms of biomedical equipment, medicine availability, including vaccines, and a motivated workforce. Amidst challenges in the drug supply chain, UNHCR operation facilitated a large-scale campaign that resulted in achieving a measles vaccination coverage of 91% by 2022 (from an 80% baseline) in Mbera¹⁸⁸.
- Established a referral mechanism among the three levels of care: Mbera's primary level facilities, Bassikounou hospital as the secondary level, and Néma, Kifa, and Nouakchott as the tertiary level. Notably, in 2021, a total of 585 referrals were made from Mbera to the second and third levels.
- Recorded healthcare data produced at various health facilities to support analysis, planning, and decision-making. This included analysing indicators during regional coordination committee meetings under the INAYA project and utilizing data for the elaboration of health care facility business plans.
- Initiate the "transversalisation" of the environment with the implementation of a waste management system in the camp's structures.

¹⁸⁵ One of the objectives of the SCAPP 2016 - 2030 is "to develop human capital and access to basic social services". The PNDS 2021 - 2030 aims to achieve a sustainable improvement in the state of health of the population through the primary health care approach, which provides equitable access to health services. Programme 4 consists of "strengthening the pillars of the health system to achieve universal health coverage". The vision of the National Health Policy for 2030 is to achieve "universal health coverage through the provision of quality essential health services and protection against the financial risks associated with illness".

¹⁸⁶ Doctors without Borders (MSF) left in 2018, then the Alliance for International Medical Action and the French Red Cross supported and monitored this transition.

¹⁸⁷ INAYA is a performance-based health financing project that Mauritania has been testing since 2019 through a pilot project first in two wilayas (Guidimaghta and Hodh El Gharbi) and then extended to the wilaya of Hodh El Chargui. The development objective of the INAYA project is to improve the use and quality of reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health services (SRMNI) in certain regions and, in the event of an eligible crisis or emergency situation, to provide an immediate and effective response. The extension for Hodh El Chargui will provide the Ministry of Health with USD 15 million for the period 2020-2023.

¹⁸⁸ Measles coverage of 75% nationwide. The HC region has the lowest infant vaccination coverage in the country (23%). Mauritania Demographic and Health Survey (EDSM) 2019-2021

- Addressed the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis through medical equipment provision, training for health personnel at the camp and nine HC health facilities and strengthening laboratorial capacities. As an example, these efforts have enabled to diagnose about 300 COVID-19 cases in 2021.

In a national context where the health system suffers from major shortcomings, including the availability of medicines and staff, Mbera has the only centre for the treatment of chronic illnesses in Bassikounou. UNHCR's health operations have been recognised by its implementing partners and users.

Even if limited budgetary resources have not enabled the HCR to cover all health needs¹⁸⁹, the beneficiaries in Mbera, whether health workers or service users, are satisfied overall and also recognise that their needs are taken into account. It was clear from the FGs carried out that after a somewhat difficult transition period (MSF's departure), the situation returned to normal with the arrival of the INAYA project. Nevertheless, due to the lengthy procedures for registering asylum seekers, new arrivals to the camp remained for months without access to health facilities due to lack of documents¹⁹⁰. In addition, the cost recovery system established in Mbera, with different levels of reimbursement from UNHCR for refugees, depending on their level of vulnerability (social register categories) and care provided, is not always understood and has created a perception of unfairness.

In addition, a number of factors have contributed to the results achieved in enabling refugees to be included in the national system:

- Fluid collaboration with the Ministry of Health to advance the goal of universal health coverage.
- The gradual hand-over of the management of the Mbera's health facilities to the national system has enabled UNHCR to gradually withdraw. As of 31 December 2022, UNHCR no longer finances the salary costs of health professionals working in Mbera health facilities¹⁹¹;
- The Mbera health centre has been included in the Finance Law since 2021.
- Access for all refugees (including urban) and asylum seekers to the national obstetric package¹⁹². - even if access is conditional on having an NIN, and in practice refugees with an NIN are in a very small minority.

However, a number of challenges persist:

¹⁸⁹ Annual results report 2022, UNHCR.

¹⁹⁰ Recently, a mechanism was put in place to ensure access to healthcare for new arrivals.

¹⁹¹ The health facilities are responsible for paying salaries and motivating staff through subsidies from INAYA (Ministry of Health), the results-based financing pilot project (FBP).

¹⁹² 85% of births to refugees and asylum seekers took place in a supervised environment in 2022. Annual results report 2022, UNHCR / At national level 70% of live births took place in a health facility, in the HEC region this rate is 45% while in the Nouakchott and Nouadhibou regions it is at least 90% (last 5 years before the DHS 2019-2021 survey), Mauritania Demographic and Health Survey (EDSM) 2019-2021.

- In the case of Mbera health facilities, the funding of services for refugees has not yet been fully transferred; it is still partly the responsibility of UNHCR and there does not seem to be an exit strategy that takes into account the ability of refugees to pay¹⁹³.
- The question of funding for refugees' access to healthcare (apart from medicines and examinations) persists, because even if they have access to the same care levels as Mauritians, the portfolio of health services covered by the national health system is limited. Added to this, is the need to maintain psychosocial and mental health support for refugees, in a context where this discipline is barely developed.
- UNHCR had limited involvement in the initial design of INAYA project in the HC region, to introduce the specific challenges of Mbera camp. In addition, UNHCR's health activities in terms of budget and type of support are dependent on the INAYA project, since they cover the costs not covered by this project in terms of access to healthcare for refugees, its results and its continuity over time. In particular, the question of the viability of the camp's health facilities under the Performance-Based Funding pilot initiative does not yet seem to have been resolved; for the time being, they depend almost exclusively on external aid, with their own income not yet being sufficient.
- National resources in health are limited¹⁹⁴ and the institutional timeframes and agendas are not always coincident with those of UNHCR.
- As with other areas of inclusion, UNHCR's internal annual budget planning system presents a challenge, both internally and for partners, to the establishment of an orderly transfer process.
- All the people interviewed felt that the health services offered in Mbera up until then were of better quality than the national services. With the transfer to the Ministry of Health, there is a dilemma as to how to maintain this quality over time.

Impact Area 3: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality

Education

UNHCR is strategically positioned at global level for refugee education^{195, 196}. In Mauritania, the movement for the inclusion of refugee children in education is developing,

¹⁹³ At the time the evaluation report was finalised, UNHCR was covering part of the costs, the MOH-INAYA another part (a large part of cat. 1), while structural costs were covered by the MOH (key HR, etc.). While this is mentioned in the roadmap agreed with the MOH which was being prepared at the end of 2022, it is planned in particular to gradually move to cat. 2 and 3 by paying for certain care. On the other hand, a) the HCR has maintained the principle of free care during the evaluation period; b) the timetable for gradually moving users to a contributory mode is not clearly defined and the process could take time and will be gradual.

¹⁹⁴ The intrinsic limitations of the national health system and the specific nature of Mbera mean that the sustainability of the services offered is a challenge: it is difficult to maintain health staff, specialist staff are very limited and there are recurrent irregularities in the supply of medicines.

¹⁹⁵ UNHCR published its Refugee Education Strategy for the first time in 2012, UNHCR's 2012-2016 Refugee Education Strategy, building on lessons learned from alternative education provision for refugees reflected in the 2011 Refugee Education Review, Refugee Education: A Global Review. Sarah Dryden-Peterson. November 2011 | UNHCR India.

¹⁹⁶ Following extensive consultations, an updated Refugee Education Strategy 2030 was published in 2019, which includes statements of support from key actors including UNICEF and the World Bank. The Refugee Education Strategy 2030 aims to contribute to the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees. UNHCR has participated in the launch of joint policy documents and strategies with other agencies. For example,

albeit at an early stage and with many challenges. UNHCR has gained experience with the inclusion of refugees in health services and social protection, as well as education in urban areas and is therefore well placed to support the transition from education services to the mainstream education system.

As refugee children have the same access to the national education system as Mauritanian children¹⁹⁷, UNHCR started from 2019 to review the way it helps refugee children access schools in urban areas. Funds have been gradually redirected from supporting refugee children enrolment in private schools to supporting state schools hosting refugees, particularly for primary and secondary schools in Nouakchott. The data suggests that this has been done systematically since 2019 with examinations facilitated by the Mauritanian authorities to assess the children's educational level to ensure that they are placed at the right grade in public schools¹⁹⁸. This experience in an urban environment allows UNHCR to draw lessons for the transition of the educational model in Mbera.

In parallel, UNHCR has made efforts to explore ways of including Malian refugee children attending school in the Mbera camp in the public system. In 2021, UNHCR developed a draft strategy for education in the Mbera camp through a process of consultation with partners and shared with the Mauritanian Ministry of Education (MoE), which presented three options^{199,200}: (i) Maintain the current Malian system within the camp, (ii) Adopt a hybrid model with a gradual transition from the Malian system to the Mauritanian system or, (iii) Fully integrate refugees into the Mauritanian education system²⁰¹. The orientations of the strategy were also communicated to the Malian Ministry of Education via the Mauritanian Ministry to take their point of view into account.

The current Mauritanian institutional context offers a favourable environment and opportunities for inclusion in education. Mauritania is preparing a new National Education Sector Development Plan (PNDSE III), which will guide its action until 2030. The PNDSE III guidance note includes the education of refugee children as an integral part of universal, equitable and inclusive access to education²⁰². UNHCR has worked closely with the government on this new plan²⁰³ and has held discussions on the financial and technical implications with the Ministry of the Economy and the Ministry of Education, which are working on the reform of the sector. Mauritania's international commitments to

UNHCR-UNICEF Global Strategy for the Education of Refugee Children advocates for their access to quality education, as set out in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda, to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.

¹⁹⁷ Article 13, Decree 022-2005 laying down the procedures for applying international conventions relating to refugees in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

¹⁹⁸ The Mauritanian authorities have facilitated the assessment of 340 refugee children in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, so that they can be enrolled in the appropriate level at the start of the 2020/2021 school year. Education for refugees in Mauritania, UNHCR 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Confidential internal document.

²⁰⁰ In-house maintenance.

²⁰¹ In July 2022, a (15-day) mission was carried out by UNHCR HQ and the regional office, with the aim of giving impetus to the 2021 education strategy. The technical mission made 18 recommendations for a "gradual but determined move towards the inclusion option" (option 3).

²⁰² This is a positive development compared to PNDSE II (2011-2020), which made no reference to refugee education.

²⁰³ UNHCR took part in the evaluation for the diagnosis of the education sector, which included the situation of refugees. The chapter on vulnerability includes education in emergency situations and refugee education. Technical support mission for refugee education in Mauritania, 13 to 23 July 2022 and internal interviews.

equitable and inclusive education, and the positive perception of education stakeholders, also point to a favourable institutional and community context. Discussions between UNHCR, families and education professionals in the Mbera camp show a greater openness on the part of refugees to consider including the “ad-hoc” camp education set up in the Mauritanian system²⁰⁴. For the provincial education authorities, the education model set up at the beginning of the camp based on a humanitarian basis created a "de facto" educational jurisdiction isolated from its environment, over which they had only limited influence and which is now perceived as unjustified.

Donors are showing a keen interest in investing in education. For example, the World Bank is planning to provide an additional USD 15 million in the next funding round as part of a new window for refugees. In parallel, UNHCR is supporting UNESCO in carrying out a costing exercise that will be used for advocacy and discussions with donors to support inclusion in education. An evaluation of a World Bank project is currently underway, which is seen as important in encouraging the government to move towards integrating refugee education into the education system.

UNHCR's role in refugee education has been facilitated by increased funding from donors who would otherwise have funded agencies traditionally known for their expertise in this area, such as UNICEF. For example, the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) ceased its funding to UNICEF for primary education in the Mbera camp and funds UNHCR for the same purpose. Nonetheless, the choice to "divide" education funding between primary (UNHCR) and secondary (UNICEF) education²⁰⁵, has not contributed to: (i) the enhancement of education in Mbera, (ii) introduction of urgent reforms²⁰⁶, (iii) standardise, simplify and make efficient support to the education system. UNICEF's expertise as the reference agency for education has not been optimised. This situation has led to some confusion in terms of leadership and coordination difficulties.

UNHCR has played a leading role in the provision of education services to refugees, although this is not an area in which UNHCR has clear expertise. In Mauritania, UNHCR co-leads the education sub-working group in the Mbera camp with UNICEF and works in partnership with local education authorities and local and international NGOs²⁰⁷. External stakeholders have indicated that UNHCR's role in refugee education needs to be better defined and should focus on the management of educational infrastructure rather than the teaching and learning process, as other agencies such as UNICEF are better placed to support. Mauritania's education system suffers from a number of challenges at all levels - quality of education, funding, governance - which may affect the educational inclusion agenda for refugee children and may require a long-term effort. As a result, UNHCR and the other actors involved in the educational inclusion programme, are faced with a process that may prove "complex" and could slow the pace of progress. The challenges of educational inclusion identified concern: (i) effective inclusion and protection, (ii) national capacity in terms of human resources and infrastructure, (iii) the

²⁰⁴ UNHCR, Education sector partners' retreat in Bassikounou, February 2021

²⁰⁵ Funding for secondary education is provided by ECHO to UNICEF, in addition to the funding provided to UNHCR for primary education.

²⁰⁶ UNHCR, Education sector partners' retreat in Bassikounou, February 2021

²⁰⁷ Nutritional aspects are being handled by the WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF.

capacity of partners working in the field, (iv) the willingness and capacities of the national system to take on inclusion.

For the 2021-2022 school year, 25%²⁰⁸ of school-age refugee children were attending primary or secondary school²⁰⁹. However, it is important to note.

- A disparity between the school attendance rates of refugee children living in urban areas (Nouakchott & Nouadhibou) and those in the Mbera camp (45% overall primary and secondary school attendance versus 24%);
- A disparity between primary and secondary school attendance rates for refugee children (50% and 37% urban versus 37% and 6% Mbera);
- A disparity between girls' and boys' enrolment rates at primary level (48% and 52% in urban areas, compared with 36% and 38% in Mbera), with contrasting figures at secondary level (39% and 35% in urban areas, compared with 4% and 9% in Mbera).

Community involvement and empowerment of women

UNHCR has promoted community-based protection to encourage the empowerment and responsibility of communities, particularly women, who played a key role. In Mbera, refugees have actively participated in decisions that affect their living conditions in the camp through community structures such as the leaders' coordination committee, the women's committee and the youth committee, in collaboration with UNHCR and local authorities. Women have played an important role in coordinating matters affecting the community. For example, women leaders have launched a campaign to update the register of people with special needs and have put forward concrete ideas for developing income-generating activities to empower them. The “Femmes Ressources” association in Mbera camp, which is involved in monitoring and taking key decisions in various areas of camp management, was supported by UNHCR (working premises and computer equipment).

Community engagement has also been significant in other areas such as education²¹⁰, drinking water, sanitation and hygiene²¹¹ and environmental protection²¹². These community initiatives, particularly when they also concern the outside of the camp, are clearly appreciated by the host community and have earned the fire brigade the Nansen Prize²¹³.

²⁰⁸ Thematic Note - Education - Situation and Prospects for the Education of Refugees in Mauritania- 2022 UNHCR

²⁰⁹ There is a marked disparity between the national enrolment rate and that of refugee children in Mbera at primary level (56% versus 37%) and secondary level (18.9% versus 6%). However, for urban refugee children, the trend is contrasting, with a slightly lower enrolment rate at primary level (50%) and twice as high at secondary level (37%).

²¹⁰ Parent-teacher associations, school clubs, Koranic teachers' committees and canteen caterers are helping to improve school attendance and monitoring of children, in coordination with the teachers' association.

²¹¹ Raising awareness of sanitation and hygiene, and latrine maintenance.

²¹² Firefighting and reforestation.

²¹³ Nansen Award: the Nansen Refugee Award has been presented annually since 1954 to individuals, groups and organisations for their outstanding dedication to the protection of refugees, internally displaced persons or stateless persons. In 2022, the Mbera Fire Brigade was the regional winner for Africa.

Community participation has also been used to reduce the risk of GBV and ensure increased access to services and support for survivors. Awareness-raising activities have been stepped up to detect and protect children and women at risk. Regular meetings were organised with refugees and asylum seekers living in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Mbera, mobilising a large number of participants, in collaboration with resource persons such as committees of elders, traditional chiefs, religious leaders, young people and student leaders. Other refugee associations have contributed to awareness-raising and prevention initiatives (e.g. Action Contre les Violences, SOS Nomade).

Impact Area 4: Securing solutions

Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration

Support for the voluntary return of a few hundred Ivorians (application of the cessation clause which came into force on 30 June 2022) was a symbolic action in relation to the resolution of a conflict. Furthermore, during the period evaluated, the majority of people with and for whom UNHCR works in Mauritania came from countries where the situation was not conducive to voluntary return, such as the Central African Republic and Syria. Concerning Malian refugees, there are “pendular movements” and the willingness to return evolves with the security context in their country of origin and also the opportunities and type of assistance received in Mauritania (and in Mali on return). In a situation where UNHCR does not encourage return, procedures have been drawn up for individual decisions. In addition, exchanges of information with the UNHCR office in Mali have been fundamental to understanding the contexts and movements, bearing in mind that there are also spontaneous returns where the UNHCR in Mauritania does not intervene.

Resettlement and complementary pathways

Resettlement is an essential tool for refugees with at-risk profiles such as LGBTIQ+, women and girls who are victims of trafficking or people with very specific health problems. UNHCR has had to face internal challenges, such as the lack of sufficient and trained staff, as well as external challenges, such as the COVID-19 crisis which affected the process during 2020 and 2021, the legal complexity of certain cases or the scarcity of quotas from hosting countries. For example, in 2022, the only country accepting refugees from Mauritania was the United States, and in 2021, 8 cases were refused by France. All in all, it was possible to process an average of around 150 cases per year during the evaluation period.

SQ2.2. What are the documented outcomes regarding the rights and well-being of refugees with the shift towards the **nexus of humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) actions, as well as the New Way of Working?**

UNHCR operation in Mauritania is one of the most advanced in terms of engagement in the HDP nexus. Its role has been strategic in advancing the inclusion of refugees, whether through direct actions such as advocacy, support for national sectoral

institutions - particularly through partnerships such as with the Ministry of Health - or the catalytic and facilitating role²¹⁴.

For the implementation of direct actions, UNHCR has succeeded in mobilising development funds (German Government, EU, UN PBF, ADB), which represent 28% of funds for the period. However, due to the difficulty of establishing a boundary between the two types of activity, and on the basis of the information available for the evaluation, it is not possible to carry out a more in-depth analysis of funds dedicated to development and funds dedicated to humanitarian aid.

In a macroeconomic context where employment and subsistence opportunities are reduced for the Mauritanian population, and even more so for the refugee population, UNHCR has launched actions for inclusion - social, economic and financial - while strengthening national services (health, education) and for local development, which have resulted in transformations. The inclusion of refugees in the national social protection and health system, activities to promote self-sufficiency and employability, and the agreement with a banking entity to establish in Mbera are just a few examples. But most of these transformations are still in early stages, as is the case for the Mbera bank office, which is currently under construction and for income-generating activities (IGAs), which have reached a small proportion of the refugee population and whose results are not yet evident in UNHCR's approach, which is still being adjusted.

The change from in-kind assistance for Mbera refugees to CBIs has boosted the camp's money circulation and contributed to the development of economic exchanges in the area. Indeed, with a sustained increase since 2018, the weight of CBIs expenditure over the total operational costs (OPS) directly implemented by UNHCR increased from 24% to 43% between 2020 and 2022²¹⁵. In this respect, the weekly market in Mbera (which benefits from tax exemption) has become one of the largest in the area and more attractive than that in Fassala (the commune to which Mbera belongs).

The actions implemented by UNHCR, in line with the HDP nexus and the GCR, in Mbera and the surrounding area, respond to the main challenges identified in this area²¹⁶ and which concern: (i) productive agro-pastoral economic activities, (ii) preservation of the environment and sustainable development, (iii) basic social services (health, education, sanitation, telecommunications network), (iv) formal economic activity by women and young people and (v) governance, as well as the strategic priorities of the Economic Development Plan for the commune of Fassala (2019-2025)²¹⁷. Support for strengthening health structures and services, the inclusion of host populations in IGAs, and community participation in environmental conservation activities are just a few examples.

The socio-economic survey carried out in 2021 to include refugees in the Bassikounou area in the national social register, has generated data that was used to target both

²¹⁴ See SQ2.3.

²¹⁵ CBI Programme 2020_2022_Summary, 1_Budget & exp data_with_2022_update.

²¹⁶ Local economic development plan for the commune of Fassala (2019-2025), March 2020.

²¹⁷ Five strategic areas: (i) Improving the supply of basic social services; (ii) Supporting the sustainable development of the département's economy; (iii) Environmental protection and sustainable development; (iv) Improving governance; and (v) Building the capacity of local players.

assistance and support actions for training, employability and IGAs. This information was useful for development actors, but data also showed persistent challenges in terms of economic development, and the main obstacles refugees face in accessing livelihood opportunities.

UNHCR has also been able to take into account the demographic profile of the people with and for whom UNHCR works and the potential of human capital in the HC, in particular with the actions carried out as part of the PBF projects and the studies carried out under the ProNexus project, which focus primarily on women and young people.

Young refugees, like young Mauritians, expect vocational training first and foremost from external aid; secondly, support to create IGAs (refugees) and cash to start a business (host population)²¹⁸. Although in theory refugees have the same access to the labour market as nationals, in practice it is still very difficult for them to find a job. In this context, UNHCR has been able to set up a partnership with the national employment agency, Techghil, in the three localities where refugees are concentrated, to give them access to vocational training, and other topics related to IGAs²¹⁹ (e.g: accounting).

The activities developed within the framework of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) are also part of this transition to promote self-reliance, in particular through market gardening activities in Mbera²²⁰ undertaken with women's cooperatives from Timbuktu, who had experience in this type of production²²¹. The current production is improving the food security of cooperative members and allows surpluses to be sold on the Mbera's market²²².

More generally, there is already experience in productive IGAs, which seem to play an important role in this economic empowerment, and certain value chains are beginning to perform well, such as dried meat production, the sale of agricultural surpluses, butcheries, as well as gas distribution and the textile and clothing trade.

Since 2021, UNHCR and GIZ have been working together to implement the "ProNexus" project, which aims to facilitate the socio-economic inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable members of host communities in Mauritania. In addition, the project aims to facilitate the coordination of development and humanitarian aid actors, in particular through the sharing of lessons learned and good practices. However, it is clear from the opinions gathered that the communication surrounding ProNexus does not enable the partners to systematically understand the objectives or the approaches for achieving

²¹⁸ Marco Cordero, Study on the vulnerability of young people in communities in the border areas of Hodh Chargui, Mauritania. IOM, UNHCR, PBF, July 2021.

²¹⁹ As an indication, 2,200 refugees and 4,800 Mauritians (09/2022) have been registered by Techghil thanks to this collaboration. However, these figures should be treated with caution, as the information available in the various monitoring reports is fragmented.

²²⁰ For example, over the last four years, 993 IGAs have been funded (SOS Désert, World Vision, COOPI). A total of 1,800 refugees have been involved in SOS Désert's agricultural activities, and a total of 284 people have taken part in technical, vocational and skills development training as part of ILO projects. The number of refugees who have benefited from a university scholarship over the last 3 years is 88 students (UNHCR and Actions NGOs). EU - UNHCR Contribution Agreement, EUTF (1 July 2017 - 30 June 2021).

²²¹ Visit to the plots in the Mbera camp.

²²² Focus groups in Mbera.

them (e.g. complementarity of skills and mandates among partners, functioning of coordination units, programme implementation timeframe).

The initiatives undertaken, even if they have great potential, present challenges both external and intrinsic to the approach of the initiatives themselves. Some of these challenges have already been identified by UNHCR (surveys and studies):

- Significant shortcomings in secondary education, with vocational training practically non-existent, in a context where Malian refugees have a lower level of education than the host population in Bassikounou area, which is already below the national average;
- Several free-of-charge actions in Mbera, with a blurred distinction and even confusion among aid recipients, between what is humanitarian and what is development; this approach does not seem to encourage refugees' responsibility or ownership, and could even have a counterproductive effect on self-reliance²²³. Refugees' perceptions of the cash and food distribution strategy, the targeting of aid recipients and support for income-generating activities are not well understood²²⁴.
- In a context of difficult access to credit, the indebtedness of refugees to certain Mauritanian traders is a risky practice that represents a constraint for certain IGAs²²⁵ who use the funds to repay the debt which normally has a very high interest rate (21%)²²⁶.
- Problems of access to water for farming activities hinder the development of agricultural IGAs²²⁷.
- Initiatives which because of the requirements of reporting and accountability systems and the obligations of everyday life, do not have sufficient capacity to adapt to continuous contextual changes²²⁸;
- Annual programming, which makes it difficult to apply a strategic approach to improve the resilience of beneficiaries (refugees and host population) and national institutions²²⁹.

Major initiatives have been undertaken to strengthen community participation. The Anti-Fire Brigades in Mbera, the village committees in the HC and the Refugee Volunteers for Camp Cleanliness are just a few examples. However, the voluntarism approach jeopardises sustainable ownership, especially in this context of limited employment opportunities²³⁰.

²²³ Examples: IGA activities for which there is no compensation, Fire Brigades that systematically receive agricultural equipment, savings groups set up in Mbera in 2019, with the potential to introduce people to financial knowledge, but with a subsidy logic that represented a sustainability issue.

²²⁴ Feedback from Focus Group meetings.

²²⁵ Credit is established because of the relationship of trust between the group or household requesting credit and the trader lending the money, so there may be undeclared over-indebtedness among some IGAs beneficiaries.

²²⁶ Focus groups, Livelihood PDM Dashboard survey data February 2023, interview.

²²⁷ There are several areas to the south of the camp but there is no water to develop all the land: Focus Groups, partners, conversations with women farmers.

²²⁸ Interviews and Survey of partners, UNHCR Mauritania, November 2022.

²²⁹ Idem.

²³⁰ A UNHCR initiative plans to transform the Refugee Volunteers for Camp Cleanliness (*Volontaires Réfugiés pour la Propreté du Camp*) association, which has more than 300 members, into a company producing charcoal briquettes from animal dung and paving stones from plastic waste.

In the same vein, in its Strategic Directions (2022-2026), UNHCR outlined a livelihoods and economic inclusion strategy, which in the case of Mauritania is confronted to a context of limited social, economic, environmental and geographical conditions - and increasingly exposed to the effects of climate change. In particular, the new strategy has to cope with: (i) the impact of the reductions in humanitarian aid on the available working capital for the refugee population and on the financial feasibility of IGAs²³¹, (ii) a border economy based on the informal sector, with an important weight of smuggled goods, and where transportation and road improvements have played an important role²³².

Social cohesion appears to be a primordial and necessary element in promoting the effective inclusion of refugees in Mauritania and enabling them to act as visible actors in local and national development. Mauritania is a relatively exceptional context, where collective efforts - local, international and by the refugees - in Mbera and neighbouring villages have succeeded in maintaining social cohesion between the two communities, in an area with limited and fragile natural resources, exposed to the effects of climate change and subject to increasing pressure and security risks.

Until 2018, the documents consulted indicate good levels of coexistence between the neighbouring populations of Mbera camp and the refugee population, with some small-scale conflicts²³³. From 2019 onwards, an increase in disputes relating to the use of the territory is documented, in parallel with the rapid increase in the arrival of the Malian population (from 84,000 registered refugees in 2018 to 106,000 in 2022). The disputes do not appear to have led to major tensions but have generated increased concern at community and local authority level due to growing pressure on scarce natural resources in a fragile ecosystem²³⁴ and competition for access to livelihoods²³⁵, particularly among young people.

The HCR has been able to integrate pilot social cohesion initiatives in the HC region through development projects. However, significant differences between the two populations in certain socio-economic aspects (e.g. better access to basic services for refugees from Mbera)²³⁶, a proven impact of the refugee population on natural resources (deforestation for firewood, competition for water for livestock) and a perception by local authorities and communities of an imbalance in favour of the refugee community; and a

²³¹ Focus groups in Mbera.

²³² Interviews and focus groups.

²³³ Conflicts over water and the use of natural resources due to pastoral activities. UNHCR (2018) Identification of economic opportunities for the population of the Mbera refugee camp and neighbouring host populations; analysis of value chains.

²³⁴ 39_Alert_Cartographie Bassikounou_rapport_2020 " Mapping of potential sources of conflict between Malian refugees and the host population in the Moughataa of Bassikounou, Mauritania.

²³⁵ See Appendix 12. Note technique sur l'analyse de l'impact de l'augmentation de la population et de ses activités agricoles sur l'utilisation des ressources naturelles dans la région de Bassikounou.

²³⁶ Sys Pons, Étude comparative sur la situation socio-économique des réfugiés et des communautés hôtes dans la région du Hodh Chargui, Mauritanie. Analysis report, 11/01/23, GIZ and UNHCR.

lack of attention to the needs of the rest of the population, results in a fragile coexistence^{237,238,239}.

Urbanisation of Mbera camp

With regard to the vision of a territorial approach to development for the Mbera camp, at national level the various initiatives and recent work show a context of commitment to spatial planning and the territorial approach to equitable development in the region. This testifies to the efforts made to promote balanced and sustainable development and provides a solid, as well as interesting, basis for its implementation by integrating the Mbera camp.

Thus, the Orientation Law n°2010-01 of 07 January 2010 was established to regulate regional planning by setting principles and regional actions. This law provides for the use of various spatial planning tools, such as the National Spatial Planning Scheme (SNAT), National Infrastructure and Major Facilities Schemes and National Land Use and Allocation Plans. However, to date, none of these tools has been developed. In this context, the Ministry of Housing, Urban Planning and Territorial Development plans to issue a call for tenders for the implementation of the SNAT in the coming months. This indicates that efforts are underway to put the provisions of the law into practice and put in place an essential spatial planning tool.

Other initiatives have been put in place to promote local development, such as the preparation of a Local Development Plan (LDP) for the locality of Mbera, carried out in collaboration with various stakeholders, including the Ministry of the Economy, Industry and Promotion of Productive Sectors.

The Hodh Chargui Public Investment Projects and Programmes Unit also plays a key role in implementing the Integrated Territorial Approach. This approach, supported by the G5 Sahel countries and the Sahel Alliance, aims to strengthen development in priority areas, including the Wilaya of Hodh Charqui²⁴⁰.

²³⁷ "[...] The massive arrival of Malian refugees has greatly contributed to the significant deterioration of the fauna and flora", Local economic development plan for the commune of Fassala (2019-2025), March 2020.

²³⁸ 75% of the young Mauritians surveyed and 90% of the young refugees felt that relations between the two populations were good / 45.8% of the young Mauritians surveyed felt somewhat disadvantaged compared to the refugees in the work of international organisations, 10.4% felt completely disadvantaged. Marco Cordero (2021). Study on the vulnerability of young people in communities in the border areas of Hodh Chargui, Mauritania. IOM, UNHCR.

²³⁹ The 2022 evaluation of the joint IOM/UNHCR PBF project, *Projet de Consolidation de la paix à travers l'engagement des femmes et de la jeunesse et le renforcement des capacités des communautés dans la région frontalière du Hodh Echargui*, reports some 150 conflicts resolved in 2020 and 2021 between the local and refugee populations (300% more than the planned target). The report of UNHCR's AGD a Mbera participatory evaluation (2022) also cites the risks and tensions between the two communities over the abusive use of natural resources and the frustration of the host community, among other things.

²⁴⁰ The CPPHC is attached to the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Promotion of Productive Sectors and is chaired by the Secretary General. Its main objectives are to :

- Implementation of development projects and programmes approved under the SCRAPP;
- Strengthening the institutional capacities of territorial administrative authorities and local communities, to help raise the quality of public policies for local development and improve the practice of governance.

Several works and publications have also been produced to integrate this approach²⁴¹. UNHCR and other actors have undertaken various analyses and studies to assess the impact of refugees in the area and identify economic opportunities for the population of Mbera camp and neighbouring host populations. This work includes a value chain analysis²⁴² and a diagnosis of the impact of refugees on host populations²⁴³, which helps to better understand local challenges²⁴⁴.

Nevertheless, even though UNHCR has been involved in coordinating and implementing all the development and inclusion actions in the Mbera camp and surrounding localities, it does so without a territorial structuring model. For the time being, there has been no overall approach to the territorial development of the Bassikounou moughataa, which would provide guidance on the anchoring of the Mbera camp and which would take into account the security, environmental, social, urban, economic, infrastructural and institutional challenges, in order to prioritise interventions and ensure territorial equity²⁴⁵.

Other external factors may affect the equitable development of the territory and the incorporation of Mbera in regional plans:

- The WB's funding lines provide de facto support for the transformation of the Mbera camp into an urban settlement, but do not include an analysis of the territorial linkages²⁴⁶.
- The process of securing and owning land is still underdeveloped in Mauritania²⁴⁷. At present, there is an attempt to regularise urban allocations dating back more than 20 years in Nouakchott, so it does not seem easy to clarify the eventual allocation of plots of land in Mbera camp. Faced with this, there is a lack of strategy for converting shelters into permanent (or at least improved) constructions.

-
- Piloting the integrated territorial approach as a methodological device that enables broad participation by the entire population and local stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation of development programmes and projects.
 - Coordination with TFPs to improve the coherence of interventions;
 - Communication on the implementation of SCRAPP projects and programmes and all development actions in the Hodh Charqui:
 - Monitoring and accountability of developments in projects and programmes in the wilaya;
 - Contributing to territorial equity in the implementation of the various projects and programmes.
 - CPPHC partnership agreements with UNDP, GIZ, UNHCR, ILO and AFD. Partnership meetings were also held with the Sahel Alliance, UNODC, IOM, the European Union, USAID, the G5Sahel Facility, ENABEL and Mauritanienne des Produits d'Elevage (MPE).

²⁴¹ For example: the FAO has carried out a mapping of natural resources in the Bassikounou Moughataa (2019). / the ILO has drawn up a study on regional planning in the Bassikounou Moughataa (2021), with global proposals and detailed studies to draw up concrete development proposals and help formulate future projects with an integral and structural vision.

²⁴² Identification of economic opportunities for the population of the Mbera refugee camp and neighbouring host populations. Analysis of value chains. UNHCR (April 2018).

²⁴³ Diagnosis of the impact of refugees on host populations. Analysis of the impact of refugees and participatory diagnoses with host populations. UNHCR (October 2019).

²⁴⁴ At the time of writing, a mission is underway to develop an integrated strategy for the Mbera camp - Geneva Technical Hub (GTH) Consultancy.

²⁴⁵ PDL Mbera 2020.

²⁴⁶ Productive and resilient intermediate cities project (WB).

²⁴⁷ The Ministry of Finance -Direction Générale du Domaine et Patrimoine de l'État- has undertaken studies aimed at reforming the land ownership system in order to implement property titles and land clarification measures. It has very limited human resources and lacks the geo-referenced databases needed to make progress on designing a land registry system.

- The border security, the worsening of the conflict in Mali, as well as the concentration of foreign population in Bassikounou and Mbera, are issues of concern for national institutions and certain international players.

SQ2.3. To what extent does UNHCR succeed in implementing its role as facilitator and catalyst?

UNHCR has had a clear catalytic effect as part of the HDP nexus, with Mauritania becoming eligible for WB IDA-RSW funds and obtaining four major projects for Mbera and the HC region, the integration of refugees into the CPDD, and the HC region into the UNCT “convergence zones”.

The PBF projects implemented jointly by UNHCR, IOM and UNDP, one of which has just been finalised and the other is starting up, have catalytic potential for results (as defined in the project ToR). At this stage, however, it is not possible to assess the effects in a meaningful way. Although the external evaluation of the joint project with the IOM²⁴⁸ is overall positive in terms of the results in favour of social cohesion, there is not enough hindsight, as there has been no consolidation of achievements or scaling up to enable a better assessment. In addition, and according to the findings of the same evaluation, it seems that the consolidation of this participative social cohesion is linked to the creation of economic development opportunities for income generation.

In addition, UNHCR has succeeded in obtaining development funds from the EU and the German government in collaboration with GIZ. These projects are in different degrees of implementation, so it is too early to draw up conclusive evidence. Nonetheless, the difficulty of executing some of these funds has been raised during the evaluation, due to their development “logic” in the face of a UNHCR’s *modus operandi* that is not adapted to long term and systemic changes. In particular, annual budgeting or the “subcontracting” of a large number of partners for implementation, which affects efficiency - including transaction, monitoring and reporting costs. This observation does not seem to be specific to Mauritania, but generalised to UNHCR operations in countries where the commitment to the HDP nexus is greatest²⁴⁹.

The facilitating effect through the sharing of data and the needs of the people with and for whom UNHCR works is achieved within the framework of several coordination platforms among public institutions, humanitarian and development actors, but also bilaterally for the inclusion of the HDP nexus in the programmes of other humanitarian actors or the refugee populations in the programmes of development agencies. On the other hand, as mentioned in SQ1.1 there was some dissatisfaction with the information available on the activities carried out in Mbera, as well as on the socio-economic profiling of the refugee population living in the camp and pendular movements. For example, surveys on the desire to return to Mali were mentioned, which would be very useful for

²⁴⁸ Mohamed Iemine Cheikh Mohamed Sidina. Évaluation finale du Projet de Consolidation de la paix à travers l’engagement des femmes et de la jeunesse et le renforcement des capacités des communautés dans la région frontalière du Hodh Echargui. Final version. IOM, UNHCR and UNPB.

²⁴⁹ UNHCR’s Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation Post-2021: How to Stay the Course. - Report on the extension of the longitudinal, independent evaluation (January 2022 - December 2022). Volume I: main report, April 2023.

UNHCR Mali if regularly updated, or data about sources of income particularly for Group 2 (moderately vulnerable), in order to better target activities to empower refugees.

At the coordination level in Mbera, while recognising the central role of UNHCR, the impression was raised that UNHCR's presence was too strong and that UNHCR's co-lead role in sectors where there are specialised agencies or bodies does not seem to be always well perceived by all the actors.

SQ2.4. To what extent is the **growing body of data** and information for monitoring and evaluating the operation (e.g. surveys, studies and evaluations) used for decision-making and planning?

In recent years, UNHCR has gradually strengthened its planning, monitoring and analysis tools in Mauritania and dozens of reports, dashboards and documents have been produced. The evaluation prioritised the review of the most relevant documents. From the point of view of data disaggregation, the documents consulted show adequate disaggregation by age and gender but, to a lesser extent, by specific vulnerabilities and linguistic minorities.

The monitoring system shows annual fragmentation and dispersion of indicators, which has made it difficult to assess the usefulness of these indicators (performance and impact) for making programmatic decisions ²⁵⁰. In addition, the introduction of the new results framework in 2022 and the difficulty of linking the 2020-21 and 2022 adds a further layer of complexity to the analysis of performance trends. Without being exhaustive, the following advances in the production and use of data stand out:

- The implementation of COMPASS in 2022 as a new results-based tool and a central element of the new planning (and multi-annual monitoring), as part of the global organisational transformation processes; although it is premature to assess the contribution of COMPASS, particularly as a decision-making tool, positive perceptions have been identified: i) on the relevance of establishing a medium-term vision of the operation, particularly important for UNHCR offices with a development component; ii) the clarity of the results framework and the simplification of the planning structure. On the other hand, UNHCR budgeting still mainly based on an annual funding logic (it is the funds available at a given time which determine priorities, objectives and targets), or the establishment of annual agreements with partners were mentioned as constraints which COMPASS was unable to change.
- UNHCR Mauritania has been selected as one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the new Results Monitoring Survey (RMS). The preliminary results of the first RMS conducted in Mauritania at the end of 2022²⁵¹ were available in February 2023. It is still too early to assess the implementation of the results of the RMS, given that the new multi-annual strategy (2024-2026) is currently being drawn up. In general, based on partial data and documents, it seems that most of the themes

²⁵⁰ Example: Only 19% of the performance indicators had continuity from one year to the next during the period 20-21.

²⁵¹ Main preliminary results of the performance monitoring survey (RMS Sept-Nov 2022), 28 February 2023. UNHCR.

analysed (e.g. household living conditions, inclusion in social protection, education, health, livelihoods) are linked to the "impact and results areas" of the new strategy.

- As part of the institutional policy on age, gender and diversity (AGD), UNHCR conducted participatory assessments in urban areas (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou)²⁵² and in Mbera, Bassikounou and Fassala²⁵³ during 2022. The results of this participatory evaluation form part of the "Priority Setting Report", which reflects the priorities identified by the different age and gender sub-groups, in line with the protection objectives selected in the SDGs, the Protection Agenda and UNHCR results framework.
- To complement the participatory evaluations, UNHCR conducted a survey in 2022 to gather partners' views on existing collaboration; the results were extremely positive, and the vast majority of recommendations have been incorporated into UNHCR's programmes and implementation mechanisms. However, recurring recommendations include the need for greater programmatic and budgetary flexibility to adapt actions to changing circumstances and greater stability, the duration of partnership agreements, the simplification of procedures, and the visibility of partner organisations; these are aspects that in general go beyond UNHCR capacities and complex to address since they are part of corporate global practices and procedures.
- UNHCR has made a significant effort in terms of monitoring the different types of assistance to people with and for whom UNHCR works, through the distribution of cash and in-kind grants, particularly for livelihood support and economic self-sufficiency²⁵⁴. However, the evaluation found it difficult to identify the extent to which all this data, which covers a wide range of programmatic intervention, was used for decision-making.
- In terms of external evaluations ^{255, 256}, the implementation of the recommendations of the 2017-2019 report on the livelihoods programme in Mauritania, shows partial progress; some of the recommendations have clearly been adopted and implemented by UNHCR to drive its strategic reorientation towards inclusion and development (as part of the HDP Nexus)²⁵⁷ but, in other cases, progress seems more limited²⁵⁸.

²⁵² Participatory evaluation in urban areas (Nouakchott & Nouadhibou) / Inclusion strategies and communication with communities UNHCR Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, July 2022.

²⁵³ Report on the participatory evaluation carried out using the AGD approach in Mbera, Bassikounou and Fassala UNHCR sub-delegation in Bassikounou on 29 June-01 July 2022.

²⁵⁴ Post Distribution Monitoring (gas, livelihood, soap, shelter, urban PBS, Country CBI Data Review (2022) / Power BI Report 2020, 2021, 2022 / Cash interventions for refugees and host populations, Key results 2021, UNHCR Mauritania / Bassikounou post distribution monitoring report on agricultural inputs, June 2022 / Mbera camp post distribution monitoring report on hygiene kits, 2021.

²⁵⁵ Evaluation finale du Projet de Consolidation de la paix à travers l'engagement des femmes et de la jeunesse et le renforcement des capacités des communautés dans la région frontalière du Hodh Echargui. IOM / UNHCR, June 2022n / Decentralized Evaluation of UNHCR's Livelihoods Programme in Mauritania (2017-2019); Evaluation report March 2020, decentralized, ES/2019/15.

²⁵⁶ Internal Audit Division Report 2020 / 041, Audit of the operations in Mauritania for UNHCR, 2020. Assignment AR2020 - 131 - 01.

²⁵⁷ Ex: Develop strategic dialogue at HQ level between internal units to better link livelihoods to sustainability, and between UNHCR and the World Bank.

²⁵⁸ Ex: UNHCR, as a primary convener of development partners around refugee LEI should convene stakeholders and lead United Nations partners to develop a plan to address the urgent environmental degradation of the Moughataa / Change the budget cycle length for livelihoods programming / Foster improved M&E of livelihoods activities.

UNHCR has carried out numerous thematic or sectoral studies and surveys which have made it possible to monitor specific needs in different contexts (urban, Mbera) and at different times (pandemic). For example, the survey of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou²⁵⁹ was decisive in setting up the field unit, the analysis of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19²⁶⁰ helped to adjust the humanitarian response to a sudden-onset crisis, the socio-economic categorisation of refugees was essential for their inclusion in the national social registry²⁶¹ and the mapping of potential sources of conflict in the Bassikounou moughataa²⁶² provided elements to strengthen actions aimed at social cohesion and community-based protection.

Q3. To what extent were the available resources used efficiently?

The growth in the operation's budget has enabled to significantly strengthen presence and scope of action in Mauritania. At the same time as human resources were steadily increasing, both in terms of numbers and budget, there was widespread internal concern that they are insufficient to meet the ambitions of the operation (e.g. reducing the backlog for RSD procedures, development challenges, inclusion and the nexus approach, the future of Mbera, response capacity in the event of a massive influx of refugees or a food/environmental crisis). Despite the significant mobilisation of human resources, there are some imbalances between ambitions and capacities, between units, offices/delegations and types of contract. In addition, UNHCR has experienced a high turnover of staff, particularly international staff, which has had an impact on the ability to pass on knowledge, institutional memory and, in some cases, handover processes. In terms of the organisational chart, certain hierarchical relationships and assignments to functional groups are not easy and straightforward to understand.

UNHCR's regionalization process seems to have been technically successful, benefiting from the tools, guidelines, and expertise provided by the Regional Bureau (Amman) but it appears to be less clear at strategic level. There seems to be a lack of forums for exchanging a comprehensive regional vision and joint reflections on approaches and solutions to be developed and applied at the national level.

Decentralization within the Mauritania operation is viewed positively, considering the existence of differentiated local operational dynamics, programmatic needs, and the rising number of people with and for whom UNHCR works. Nonetheless,

²⁵⁹ A Respondent Driven Sampling; survey of migrants and refugees in Nouadhibou, Mauritania, July 2019.

²⁶⁰ Results of a sampling survey on the impact of COVID 19 on the socio economic and protection situation of refugees in the Mbera refugee camp, UNHCR Mauritania, July 2020.

²⁶¹ Inclusion of refugees from Bassikounou in Mauritania's national social registry. Key Results from the Socio-economic survey, December 2021.

²⁶² Mapping potential sources of conflict between Malian refugees and the host population in the Bassikounou Moughataa, Mauritania.

challenges exist in terms of coordination and communication between field offices / units and the concentration of human resources in the Nouakchott office.

Coordination with UNHCR-Mali appears effective operationally but lacks frequency at the strategic level. Regular exchanges have facilitated sharing information on security, common issues of interest for both countries (e.g: education) and adapting cross-border responses.

SQ3.1. How efficiently has coordination between UNHCR Mauritania and Mali been ensured (in the areas of context analysis, preparation, assistance and solutions)?

Coordination with UNHCR operations in Mali took place at both strategic and operational levels²⁶³. Communication between UNHCR office in Nouakchott and the office in Bamako has been effective and useful. The face-to-face meeting in Nouakchott in November 2022 recognised the relevance of exchanges between the two operations. Nevertheless, this was the only meeting at this level held during the period, even though it is scheduled to take place every six months and this mechanism appears to be of great importance for sharing a bilateral and regional vision of the Sahel, which is experiencing major challenges such as security, instability, economic problems and the effects of climate change.

In view of this, and over and above the disruption caused by the COVID-19 crisis, the question arises as to what influence the fact that the two countries are part of two different regions in UNHCR's global organisation chart might have (MENA for Mauritania and West Africa for Mali and the other three Sahel countries). In the MENA Regional Bureau, which has to manage large-scale humanitarian crises, UNHCR operation in Mauritania is likely to have limited visibility²⁶⁴. In addition, certain key regional and international bodies (e.g. G5 Sahel Joint Force, UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel) are including Mauritania in their analysis and multi-country response to the crisis. However, UNOCHA does not include Mauritania in its humanitarian response plan for the Sahel.

At a technical level, the monthly meetings between the two operations are held regularly, and the sharing of information - mainly on security issues, the intentions of refugees, and conditions in the potential areas of return to Mali - is proving useful for both offices. For example, this communication makes it possible to mitigate duplication of assistance for refugees who regularly move between the two countries (pendular movements), or to better manage the census at the time of community elections. It has also made it possible to detect the double hatting of Malians teachers in the Mbera camp and in Mali, benefiting from a double salary.

In addition, certain points identified through these exchanges of information appear to be challenges for UNHCR: (i) the frequency of surveys on the willingness to return, in order to prepare operations in Mali accordingly, in a context where returns appear to be increasingly taking place spontaneously, (ii) Information to be provided to refugees in and around Mbera on the conditions for their return and the level of assistance in Mali,

²⁶³ See SQ3.1 for operational coordination.

²⁶⁴ See SQ3.3

in order to manage expectations and avoid misunderstandings, (iii) the limited level of monetary assistance received in and around Mbera and the precariousness of the situation mean that some refugees regularly cross the border, with the protection risks that this entails.

In addition, in a context of mixed movements crossing Mauritania from South to North along the Atlantic coast, the communication between the Mauritania and Senegal UNHCR offices for a joint analysis and adaptation of the response to these flows could not be documented.

SQ3.2. To what extent is UNHCR staff structure in Mauritania adapted to needs (aligned with the new way of working method; GCR and inclusion priority)?

Human resources²⁶⁵ have grown steadily over the period 2019-2023, with an increase of around 40%²⁶⁶ (excluding UNV/JPO) (+63% and +33% for "international" and "national" staff, respectively). In 2022, the Staff was comprised of 120 people, 18% of whom were international staff. The UNV and JPO contracts represented more than 20% of the overall workforce in 2020 and 2021 and 32% in 2022 (see Figure 09).

Similarly, the budget allocated (OL) to the " Staff" budget line is steadily increasing over the same period (+84% between 2019 and 2023) and reached 27% (USD 7.5 million) of the overall budget (OL) in 2022²⁶⁷.

The number of staff assigned to Nouakchott has grown steadily over the period 2019-2022, with a significant increase of around 59% between 2019 and 2022²⁶⁸. Over the same period, the number of staff assigned to Bassikounou increased by 56%. It remains stable in Nouadhibou from 2020 onwards.

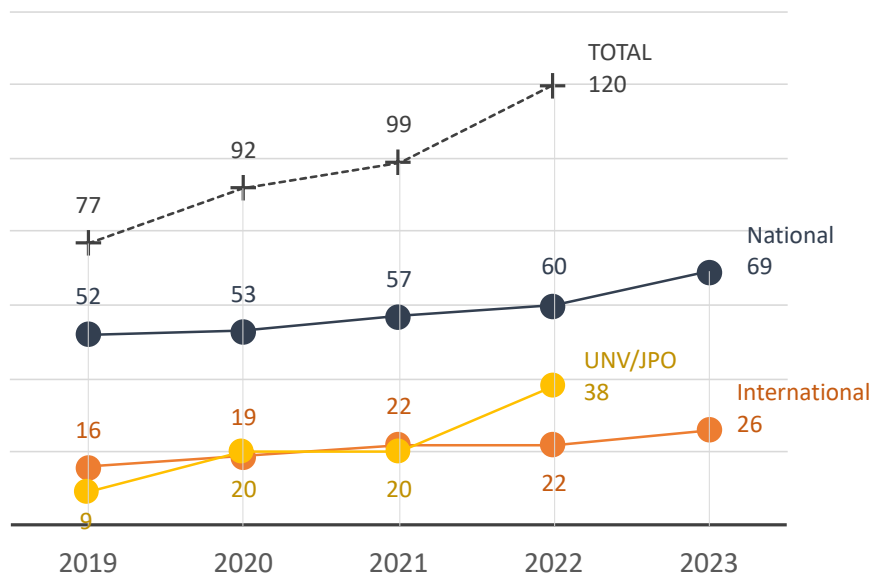
FIGURE 09. Changes in Staff (#) by type of contract, 2019-2023.

²⁶⁵ By human resources (STAFF) we mean only national and international staff accounted for in the Staff budget. UNVs and JPOs are taken into account (until 2022) in terms of the number of staff and not in terms of the budget, as their cost is not charged to the STAFF budget line. The lack of data for UNOPS staff (charged to OPS) means that they cannot be included in this analysis.

²⁶⁶ Excluding UNV/JPO.

²⁶⁷ Mauritania personnel data by year, staff type, position, cost, 1_Budget & exp data_with_2022_update.

²⁶⁸ +63% for "international" staff, +32% for "national" staff and 160% for "UNV/JPO" staff. Mauritania personnel data by year, staff type, position, cost, Organigramme 2022.



Source: Mauritania personnel data by year, staff type, position, cost, *Organigramme 2022*.

Over the period 2019-2022, the number of staff in the *Operational Delivery* and *International Protection & Solutions* functional groups increased (by 129% and 60% respectively). The administrative workforce - "*Administration, finance and HR*" - remained stable during this period, but its weighting in relation to the total workforce decreased significantly (from 29% to 19% between 2019 and 2022)²⁶⁹. Despite the increase in staff, there is widespread internal concern about the insufficiency of human resources to meet the ambitions of the operation. The limitation of human resources has been critical in the development, livelihoods, registration and community-based protection teams, given the complexity and multi-sectorality of protection and development (nexus) actions, economic self-sufficiency and social cohesion. The *backlog* for RSD procedures or the capacity to respond in the event of a massive influx of refugees, particularly from Mali, or a food/environmental crisis, are two challenges that are on the collective mind.

UNHCR is experiencing a high turnover of staff, particularly "international" staff. The 24-month period planned for international staff assignments in Mauritania, although in line with corporate policy, has consequences for the continuity and stability of the operation. In fact, in 2021, only 59% of the workforce was already present in 2019, 74% of whom were "nationals" and 23% "internationals". In 2021, 28% of the workforce is new, of which 18% are "national" and 55% "international"²⁷⁰. This situation limits institutional memory and the ability to pass on knowledge within the operation.

In terms of the organisation chart²⁷¹, it is difficult in some cases to distinguish between the hierarchical relationships and the allocation to functional groups. For example, the Nouadhibou field unit is hierarchically dependent on the Protection team in Nouakchott. In the same way, it has been noted that information sharing internally is not fluid or on time, with repercussions in terms of deadlines and the quality of information transmitted. This is the result of inadequate reporting lines and diverging perspectives between the

²⁶⁹ Mauritania personnel data by year, staff type, position, cost.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ At the time of writing, an internal staffing review is underway.

field teams and the Nouakchott office. In addition, the evaluation found a degree of compartmentalisation (“silo effect”) between the programme, protection and CBP units, due to the existing workloads in all the units and the differing work dynamics²⁷². The difficulty in finding staff with sufficient experience to work in the field (Bassikounou and Nouadhibou) also seems to be a factor to be considered.

SQ3.3. To what extent has the 2020 reform of regionalization and decentralization within UNHCR achieved the anticipated outcomes in Mauritania compared to before (namely increased authority, swifter and more efficient response, improved coordination with stakeholders, and heightened national ownership)?

In Mauritania, despite the limited sources of information on this issue, the regionalisation process appears to be technically very satisfactory, in terms of the level and quality of the tools, guidelines and expertise provided by the Regional Bureau in response to the needs expressed. At the strategic level, the assessment of the period evaluated appears more mixed, with a lack of forums for exchange around a global regional vision (MENA region) and for joint reflection on the approaches and solutions to be put in place at national level. More concretely, issues such as the inclusion of refugees and the mainstreaming of climate change emerged as key current issues for which UNHCR office in Mauritania has not received the desired support. As with the findings on strategic coordination between the Mauritania office and UNHCR office in Mali, the question arises as to whether Mauritania is an exception, since it represents a unique case in the MENA region in a context of complex crises. In this context, it should be noted that in budgetary terms, Mauritania only has 2.3% of the region's operational budget (OL).

The decentralisation of the operation in Mauritania, with the creation of the Nouadhibou office shortly after the start of the decentralisation process, seems clearly positive in a context of mixed movements with a continuous increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers in the area. This field office is fully justified to ensure effective management and response, whether directly or through implementing partners. The proximity of these partners, other agencies such as the IOM (with whom the office is shared) and the authorities facilitates coordination, information sharing and technical institutional dialogue on key dossiers (RSD, NIN, school enrolment, birth certificates, etc.), as well as targeting specific needs²⁷³.

Nevertheless, some challenges have been identified. From the perspective of teams on the ground, it is a question of finding the right balance between sufficient autonomy for action and good coordination and adequate support from the head office²⁷⁴.

The causal link between the restructuring of UNHCR (with the aim of bringing it closer to the people and the authorities) and national ownership of refugee protection and inclusion cannot be verified. However, it is clear that the close relations between UNHCR teams and decentralised institutions (regional and local) is helping to strengthen dialogue and advocacy. The recent opening of a field unit in Néma is in line with this approach.

²⁷² Internal interviews (UNHCR).

²⁷³ See SQ1.1 and SQ2.1

²⁷⁴ See SQ3.2.

Q4. How can UNHCR build on its achievements, current challenges and opportunities to better leverage its strategic position, comparative advantage and influence within the country and region to advance **collective protection efforts and solutions**?

UNHCR's inclusion strategy has made it possible to create new opportunities for the refugee population in the context of a protracted crisis, and to combine the maintenance of humanitarian interventions (which remain essential to meet basic needs) with the creation of opportunities for access to social services and livelihoods, both in Mbera and in the towns.

Inclusion actions between 2020– 2022 (associated with the development of Mbera) appear to have alleviated basic needs and stimulated the socio-economic development that had begun in the camp (although quantitative data in this regard is limited) through pastoral, agricultural and commercial activities. UNHCR's work on inclusion has been appropriate given the involvement of Mauritanian institutions, and the potential of the global collaboration with the WB ("refugee sub-window") applied to Mauritania and with other development actors. Despite this, progress in terms of inclusion varies between sectors or public services and certain challenges persist, such as the inclusion of refugees (new arrivals) in basic public services as soon as they arrive, or the sustainability and quality of public services in the long term.

Despite its comparative advantage in the coordination of refugee issues, UNHCR's role in inclusion and more broadly in the HDP nexus is not well understood by all the actors, or even internally, where the two schools of thought - humanitarian and development – try to find a balance and synergies that are not obvious. Externally, joint inter-agency programming shows positive examples (e.g. WFP, IOM) but also insufficient development and stability in the face of the challenges related to refugee inclusion, as well as a certain perception of UNHCR competition with development actors.

In terms of the sustainability of the national asylum system, and despite the commitment for the protection of refugees in Mauritania, access to asylum depends entirely on the capacity of UNHCR due to the absence of an asylum law and related mechanisms. Despite UNHCR's sustained support for the GoM, the elements needed to build a national asylum system have not yet been put in place.

SQ4.1. To what extent is UNHCR's role in the inclusion programme (which involves the GoM, WB, UN agencies and other actors) appropriate in relation to the context, expectations and capacities of the set of actors?

In January 2020, UNHCR Division of Resilience and Solutions carried out an in-depth analysis of the transition from humanitarian assistance to vulnerability-based targeting in Mbera. The report drew up a roadmap based on the analysis, using the WB IDA refugee *sub-window* (RSW) projects as a starting point, with the aim of including refugees from the Hodh Chargui region in national services (social assistance, health, drinking water, sanitation and electrification of the camp). The implementation of this roadmap shows progress in certain key areas, but some of the assumptions could not be put into practice and some challenges could not be tackled²⁷⁵.

UNHCR has been able to have a catalytic and facilitating effect on the inclusion agenda (see SQ2.3) but despite this, its strategy appears to be very dependent on WB structuring projects aiming at the inclusion of refugees in the Hodh Chargui region. The HCR operation has had to adapt to cover the gaps in the WB's financed social aid and health projects, without any apparent prior agreement, and also depends on the conditions for the continuity of these projects.

The transition undertaken by UNHCR from global humanitarian assistance based on status to targeted assistance based on vulnerability has been delayed for a number of reasons, including the difficulty in deciding on the best method for categorising vulnerability, the implementation of the social register using the chosen method (due to the COVID-19 crisis) and the lack of human resources with specific expertise (livelihoods and development), among others.

More specifically, with regard to economic inclusion of refugees, interventions on livelihoods and self-reliance have been delayed by the protracted crisis situation and the reduction in funds available for humanitarian assistance. They started in 2018 (more timidly in 2014) with development funds. Furthermore, continuity for the period 2020-2022 does not seem to have considered the availability of funds, nor the withdrawal of UNHCR, with the consequences that this could have on the people with and for whom UNHCR works²⁷⁶.

UNHCR has launched initiatives to promote financial inclusion through partnerships with the private sector. In addition to the four banks and two microcredit institutions already working with the refugee population, a new bank and a microcredit company are due to open in the next few months in Mbera, facilitating access to new financial services. It should be noted that there are many conflicting publications on the use of microcredit and access to certain financial products as an exit strategy from poverty²⁷⁷.

²⁷⁵ For example, UNHCR's involvement in drawing up the operational procedures for WB projects, and in their implementation, has been very limited, even though it appears to be essential because of its knowledge of the refugee population, of protection issues - which cannot be neglected - and of its experience in operationalising the humanitarian response.

²⁷⁶ OIOS, Audit Mauritania, 2020.

²⁷⁷ Without having carried out a literature review, here are a few examples:

A number of challenges have been met in relation to UNHCR's position on the inclusion of refugee populations:

- The maintenance of humanitarian assistance (mainly through CBIs) to provide some level of stability facilitating refugees the gradual transition towards integration into national services. This means that UNHCR, along with other humanitarian actors and donors, have to fill gaps in humanitarian funding while preparing responsible and timely disengagement strategies, without compromising WB investments. This was noted by a mission from UNHCR headquarters²⁷⁸ but continues to be relevant, particularly given the delay in WB-funded projects with the GoM.
- The issue of refugees who are not eligible for the public services supported by the WB projects, namely (i) new arrivals, since there are no plans to include them systematically in the social registry, but to wait for the next registration; (ii) urban refugees, since they are located outside WB project regions. On this point, UNHCR is lobbying for this population to be included in Tekavoul, and giving them access to social protection.
- The quality of basic social services offered to refugees, in a context where specific services created in the camp are transferred to national services with limited capacities. The question arises as to what limits and standards are acceptable to UNHCR, given that there are no precise guidelines on this point²⁷⁹. UNHCR's role to promote the GCR and the involvement of development actors in strengthening national services (health and education) is fundamental.

It was found that UNHCR's role in the inclusion programme, and more broadly in the HDP nexus, is not understood by all actors, or even internally, where the two schools of thought - humanitarian and development – try to find a balance and synergies that are not obvious. While UNHCR's role in inclusion and HDP nexus is defined internally within the organisation – coordinator, advisor, and facilitator-catalyst – there's a perception among certain development and humanitarian entities that UNHCR is shifting towards developmental initiatives. However, this transition seems mismatched with its expertise and implementation mechanisms. This observation doesn't appear exclusive to Mauritania, as it aligns with a conclusion from a recent evaluation report regarding UNHCR's engagement in humanitarian-development cooperation²⁸⁰.

As underlined by the evaluation of the CPDD 2018-2022 and the information gathered, UNHCR plays a leading role on issues relating to forced displacement and has a remarkable comparative advantage with a strong capacity and know-how in operations, logistics and humanitarian issues. On the other hand, the coordination role when it

Dhawan, S.M.; Wilson, K.; Zademach, H.-M. Formal Micro-Credit for Refugees: New Evidence and Thoughts on an Elusive Path to Self-Reliance. *Sustainability* 2022, 14, 10469. Reduce Poverty with Microfinance: UNRWA Helps Palestinian Refugees <https://borgenproject.org/reduce-poverty-with-microfinance/>
<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/policy-insight/microcredit-impacts-and-limitations>
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/03/30/does-microfinance-still-hold-promise-for-reaching-the-poor>

²⁷⁸ DRS Mission report, 20-31 January 2020.

²⁷⁹ Except for health: UNHCR's "*Global Public Health Strategy 2021-2025*" specifies that inclusion should only be promoted when the quality of the national system is deemed sufficient.

²⁸⁰ UNHCR's Engagement in Humanitarian-Development Cooperation Post-2021: How to Stay the Course. Report on the extension of the longitudinal, independent evaluation (January 2022 - December 2022), Volume I: main report. April 2023.

comes to development actions that include refugees does not seem to be really accepted by all the actors, in particular by the lack of specialisation in certain areas of development (e.g. economic development, employment, entrepreneurship) and by unsuitable planning logic and tools (e.g. annual budgeting, OLS, annual project partnership agreements).

SQ4.2. To what extent is UNHCR's strategy for developing the capacities of the GoM and the actors concerned, with a view to establishing an **asylum system, sustainable?**

The inter-ministerial decree on the 1951 Convention and other legal and administrative mechanisms have ensured a high level of international protection and the fulfilment of the rights of the refugee population in Mauritania. However, access to asylum in Mauritania depends entirely on the capacity of UNHCR due to the absence of a national law on asylum and of public institutions with the mandate, resources and expertise to manage access to RSD and the various international protection mechanisms.

The GoM has promoted actions to make international commitments operational, and its engagement has been essential in facilitating the work of UNHCR, ensuring key aspects of international protection, access to documentation, as well as facilitating inclusion in social policies and programmes. Progress on rights and inclusion coexists with legal and institutional gaps which have not enabled UNHCR to support the development of national capacities and the design and set-up of a national asylum system. During the period evaluated, the minimum conditions for developing a national asylum system, as defined by UNHCR, did not exist²⁸¹.

At present, the general perception is that the current electoral cycle (municipal elections 2023 and presidential elections 2024) is not conducive to advancing legal or systemic reforms in the field of asylum (internal and external interviews). However, two potential lines of action have been identified: (i) at national level, there seems to be some scope for institutional and political advocacy (in particular with MIDECE and the National Consultative Commission on Refugee Status) and thus prepare the ground for the next government mandate, (ii) at international level, the commitments made by the GoM in terms of protection and asylum in 2018 and 2019 could form part of the preparation and government participation in the next Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2023.

Generally speaking, the situation faced by UNHCR in Mauritania in developing the national asylum system is in line with the conclusions of a recent evaluation of UNHCR's work worldwide on strengthening national asylum systems²⁸².

²⁸¹ UNHCR Asylum Capacity Development (ACD) Evaluation. An Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's Support for Strengthening National Asylum Systems. See Figure 5 - Proposed new capacity development approach for RSD (2022).

²⁸² "UNHCR's right to have direct access to individual asylum-seekers, and to comment or advise on individual cases, is widely respected, but this tends not to translate to significant influence over systems-level performance. Instead, UNHCR relies on persuasion, which, as some of the case studies and survey responses show, has had limited effect when faced with weak or deteriorating asylum policy environments. In exercising its supervisory role, in some countries UNHCR has put less emphasis on pressing the government to meet its international obligations for protection, because of the resistance this has met and concern that the end result may be a more negative protection environment. Instead, it has tended to emphasize supporting the government to pursue specific projects or activities. This has improved working relationships with governments and may lead to some gains in capacity but reduces UNHCR's role in helping

5 LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

5.1 Lessons learned

The experience of **transferring health services from the Mbera camp to the GoM**, although not completed, **has provided the following lessons for the forthcoming transfer of education services**:

- Service transfer is a gradual process, necessitating multi-year planning. It should be carried out progressively to ensure consolidation and ownership at each step and should be closely monitored.
- Inclusive and participatory stakeholder engagement is vital from the outset of the initiative.
- National engagement and capacities at all levels (central, regional, local/strategic, technical) are essential. The funding for the entire process should adhere to a national system strengthening approach.
- Initial programming should take into account service quality and sustainability.
- Effective coordination and synergy with development actors working in the sector are crucial, particularly concerning refugee integration and reinforcing the existing national system.
- The process must allow for the integration of all people with and for whom UNHCR works from the moment of their arrival, regardless of their administrative status.

Regarding the experience of the evaluated period in terms of **selecting IGAs and their implementation modalities to enhance refugees' economic inclusion, foster social cohesion, and develop resilient ecosystems in Mbera camp**, the following lessons can be derived:

- The choice of promising sectors should be based on a study that takes into account value chains, but also the know-how, understanding and traditions of the beneficiaries (the refugee population, depending on the ethnic group, and the host population). Nevertheless, poor traditional practices (low yields, impact on the environment) must be identified in order to propose better solutions.
- The environmental context, given limited natural resources, their preservation, and the risks and effects of climate change, must be integrated holistically, especially in HC (but also for populations residing in urban areas).
- Active involvement of rights holders in analysing past experiences to identify success factors and shortcomings.

the government to hold itself accountable for building quality asylum systems, which is itself the basis for investing in ACD." 2022 UNHCR Asylum Capacity Development (ACD) Evaluation. An Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's Support for Strengthening National Asylum Systems.

- It is essential to ensure coordination between all the players (Techghil, private sector, development players, HC Coordination Unit) in order to share information in existing coordination forums, harmonise approaches, promote complementarity and avoid overlap.
- When selecting beneficiaries, a certain number of criteria must be taken into account, with the emphasis on people, and in particular young people and women: (i) consider individual initiatives separately from collective initiatives; (ii) give importance to initiatives with the capacity to create jobs; (iii) take into account the applicants' previous experience, knowledge or training; (iv) ensure basic capacity building prior to funding; (v) consider the commitment and stability of the individual, particularly for residents in urban areas.
- Conditions for providing IGA, such as removing refugee recipients from the aid registry and introducing a symbolic repayment for the received amount, could be considered to reinforce accountability and the sustainability of supported initiatives.

5.2 Good practices

Emphasis on social cohesion through:

- Undertaking socio-economic activities that involve the host population in Mbera and its vicinity, in addition to the refugee population.
- Inclusion of women in economic activities as well as conflict management mechanisms and efforts.
- Incorporating the "Peace" component of the HDP nexus into socio-economic activities and community strengthening in Bassikounou.
- Placing growing relevance on the preservation and management of natural resources in a context where they are a primary source of social tensions. This includes initiatives such as forming the Fire Brigades in Mbera, and reforestation initiatives in Mbera and its surroundings, following excessive exploitation of wood species for firewood.
- Integrating the HC region into significant development projects (World Bank projects for health, electrification, and development of drinking water infrastructures) that will benefit all residents of the region (both Mauritians and Malian refugees), facilitated by UNHCR's catalytic effect.

Start of the "transversalisation" of environmental protection in all actions concerning the Mbera camp:

- Given the fragility of natural resources, particularly in the HC, the importance they play in daily life and in the main economic activities of its population (livestock, plant products) and their increasing exposure to climatic phenomena, such as flooding and

erosion²⁸³, due in part to overexploitation of forest resources, sedentarisation, increased livestock density and climate change.

- Recognizing the considerable strain exerted on these natural resources by the refugee population settled in Mbera and its surroundings, including deforestation for obtaining firewood and charcoal for cooking, and water consumption for both inhabitants and livestock.

UNHCR has undertaken a wide range of initiatives to integrate environmental conservation - taking into account the effects of climate change - into the lives of the Mbera refugees, while repairing and minimising the impacts caused by their presence since their arrival²⁸⁴. These included:

- Establishing a partnership with gas distributors for their deployment in Mbera, coupled with cash distribution (CBI) for purchasing kits and cylinders.
- Initiating a pilot project for biogas production for cooking.
- Installing solar panels for electricity generation in the camp's communal facilities and for well pumping.
- Training volunteer refugees in the utilization of latrine sludge for tree planting on deactivated septic tanks.
- Introducing income-generating activities related to environmental preservation and sound natural resource management, through the aforementioned initiatives.

²⁸³ Rainfall has increased by 100 mm in the last 40 years. It rains more intensely in less time, which increases erosion.

²⁸⁴ See previous good practice on social cohesion.

6 CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Strategic level

CS1. Institutional framework for protection and national asylum system

In a context that is institutionally and socio-culturally conducive to welcoming refugees, UNHCR has advanced the protection space and demonstrated responsiveness and adaptability in tailoring its protection response to different local contexts and needs, including mixed movements in Nouadhibou and Nouakchott; and the protracted crisis situation in the Mbera camp.

The GoM's position on asylum of Malian refugees has been exceptional and instrumental in ensuring protection and integration, even if some issues have not progressed as planned (e.g. asylum law, prevention of statelessness and access to civil documentation). The mobilisation of central administrations and allocation of state resources to host and include the refugee population in public services has been considerable, but UNHCR and international actors continue to be responsible (from an institutional, operational and financial point of view) for providing assistance and support to refugees, within the framework of mixed movements. This delegation of responsibilities from the State to UNHCR may prolong the dependence on UNHCR for access to and management of the RSD and the asylum system in general.

CS2. Nexus HDP

UNHCR's work in the HDP nexus, in collaboration with the GoM, WB and other development actors, has been instrumental in advancing the inclusion of refugees. This has been achieved through direct actions such as advocacy and supporting sectoral institutions, as well as serving as a catalyst and facilitator. Initial inclusion efforts have created opportunities for transforming the living conditions of refugees in Mauritania, but it is still early to observe lasting results. Although UNHCR has played a key role in inclusion and initiating development projects (attracting donors and other key actors), it has simultaneously been confronted to the approaches, mechanisms and timings of development interventions for which it was not sufficiently prepared. These circumstances highlight the limitations of UNHCR in ensuring and measuring the transformative impact of its catalytic role on the living conditions of people with and for whom UNHCR works and influencing processes that differ from its usual approach and expertise.

While UNHCR's position regarding the HDP nexus is clearly defined within the organization, its positioning in Mauritania is not well understood by all actors. Despite the blurred distinction between humanitarian and development actions, the shift of UNHCR towards development is perceived by key stakeholders; whilst the roles of facilitator, catalyst, and advisor in the development field remain less visible to certain organizations, whether they are development-focused or humanitarian-oriented. The lack of a clear definition of inclusion within UNHCR and the execution of funds from

multiple development donors in Mauritania during the evaluation period have not contributed to a better understanding of this shift.

From the perspective of the HDP nexus, the pursuit of preserving social cohesion has been a paramount element promoted by UNHCR, embraced by all stakeholders, notably in the HC region and the Bassikounou moughataa. However, this social cohesion shows a fragile balance due to limited natural resources exposed to environmental uncertainties, increasing human pressure and security risks.

6.2 Operational level

CO1. Responding to protection and assistance needs

UNHCR expanded its geographical coverage (Nouadhibou, Nema) and adjusted its operations (e.g., differentiated RSD procedures) to provide an effective protection and humanitarian response to a wide range of protection needs, changing local contexts requiring tailored approaches, diverse population profiles (Malian and other nationalities), and overlapping crises (COVID-19, measles outbreak and floodings in Mbera, refugee influx in 2022). However, the operationalisation of protection has faced barriers that have limited its scope, such as the: (i) modest national means and capacities; (ii) difficulties in accessing civil documentation, including birth certificates; (iii) "temporary" assumption and management of the RSD by UNHCR (on the basis of the agreement signed in 2022 with the GoM, a factor contributing to the backlog in a context of increasing demands; (iv) different situations for access to the RSD procedure between refugees in Mbera and urban refugees, or, (v) registration of refugees settled in isolated localities.

The persistence of indicators of extreme vulnerability and malnutrition, and the continued arrival of Malian refugees in the Mbera camp, have clearly justified the continuity of humanitarian assistance for basic needs, particularly for PSN, but also the gradual evolution undertaken to promote the inclusion - in all its aspects - and empowerment of this population (especially considering that the majority of Malian refugees have been living in Mauritania since 2012). Similarly, there is a situation of ambiguous perceptions between the "relationship of dependence" established with UNHCR, which inspires security and protection, and the desire for more support for empowerment, combined with the pendular movements that seek profits on both sides of the border.

CO2. Responding to the need for inclusion and self-reliance

The GoM's commitment to the inclusion of refugees in certain public policies and services has been a crucial factor in progress towards empowerment, alongside the advocacy and technical assistance activities carried out by UNHCR, which have been effective in attracting funds and development actors, and in implementing the first actions for the inclusion of refugees. Despite the initial positive effects, inclusion efforts have been hampered by dependence on international funding, delays and complexities in implementing donor projects, difficulties in accessing civil documentation, certain socio-cultural barriers (e.g., use of banking services), Social Register profiling that is not up to

date and the gradual reduction in humanitarian assistance without a clear improvement in socio-economic conditions and living standards in the Mbera camp.

Inclusion in the national social protection system and in the health system is the most advanced, although external funding is still needed in both areas, and the issue of groups of refugees who remain outside the basic services offered, which is in the process of being resolved. As far as education is concerned, the situation of refugee children in the Mbera camp has become critical, where little progress has been made in terms of inclusion in the national system and has not helped to guarantee acceptable standards of quality²⁸⁵. Given the link between education and self-reliance in adult life, if school attendance and completion of primary and secondary education by refugees is not improved (currently very low, particularly in Mbera and for girls), the likelihood of breaking the cycle of poverty and leaving the social protection and support system is minimal. In fact, the partial data available shows better indicators for refugee children integrated into public schools, indicating the possibility to reduce parallel systems and concentrate efforts on the national public system.

Significant initiatives are underway for water and electricity infrastructure development and provision in the Mbera camp. However, these initiatives were launched without a comprehensive urban planning and development plan, and without a clear vision from Mauritanian authorities. This has generated uncertainty regarding the appropriateness of chosen technical solutions, service operation, and management. Additionally, the households' capacity to pay for these services (which could impact ongoing self-reliance efforts) and the continuity of services after WB funding ends do not seem to have been well documented.

UNHCR's efforts to promote IGAs as a strategy for self-reliance and social cohesion have been positively appreciated. However, financial inclusion as a step for larger-scale IGAs is still in its early stages, despite UNHCR's capacity to mobilise the private banking sector. Furthermore, the limited resources allocated to IGAs do not reflect its central role as a pathway to self-reliance or self-employment. Financial aid to refugees at Mbera camp with no charge or pay back, blurred limits and even confusion among aid recipients about what falls under assistance and under development, might not have encouraged accountability or ownership and could even have had counterproductive effects on self-reliance. In general, the monitoring system and the data available on CBI and IGAs are somewhat heterogeneous in terms of format and period, which has made it difficult to assess effects or trends in a consistent manner.

CO3. Mbera camp

The orderly management of the camp and the leadership of the refugee community have been decisive factors in responding to the influx of people, providing a humanitarian response, stabilising the camp and, in some areas, making it an internationally recognised model of organisation and internal cohesion. However, the roadmap defined in 2020 by UNHCR for the transition of Mbera ("urbanisation") shows modest progress

²⁸⁵ See section - Education

because some of the essential premises and actions have not taken place or could not be implemented.

The implementation of infrastructure projects in the Mbera camp has led to a transition towards permanent settlement. However, despite existing territorial and sectoral analysis documents, forums for discussion and consultation with the authorities to analyse future scenarios have been rare, although the HC Coordination Unit should now be playing a central role. The lack of a consistent vision among national institutions on the evolution of the Mbera camp has made it difficult to put in place a strategy for its integration into an integrated territorial development plan for the Bassikounou moughataa. In this context, territorial equity appears to be a central aspect of social cohesion, in an area subject to growing demographic pressure and fragile balances between communities. In fact, the HCR's interventions have not been able to prevent the over-exploitation of natural resources, which are particularly exposed to climatic hazards and are a major source of income locally, creating risks for social cohesion. Recent initiatives to regenerate vegetation and integrate the green economy are still in their infancy.

6.3 Organisational level

COrg1. Regionalisation and sub-regional coordination: Mauritania, Mali (Sahel Situation), and Senegal

The results of regionalisation appear to be very satisfactory from a technical point of view, but more mixed from a strategic point of view. With regard to the situation in the Sahel, UNHCR's response to the sub-regional crisis and the deterioration of the conflict in Mali was coordinated by the UNHCR West Africa Regional Bureau, which limited the integration of the UNHCR office in Mauritania (reporting to the UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau) in internal analysis and planning forums at strategic level concerning the situation in the Sahel and in international platforms. In the context of mixed movements, communication with UNHCR in Senegal has not appeared to be clearly structured.

COrg2. Human resources

The human resources structure has been strengthened in order to respond to the growth in operations both in terms of quantity (increase in the number of people with and for whom UNHCR works) and quality (diversity of situations, adaptation to different sub-national realities, new programmes). However, despite this mobilisation, a number of territorial, functional and programmatic imbalances have emerged; the imbalances have also concerned certain measures taken in terms of "work-life balance" (e.g. teleworking) which have not been applied equally across units and offices and which the internal "staffing review" currently underway is probably analysing. Limited human resources and working in "silos" were critical factors in the development, livelihoods, registry and community-based protection teams, given the complexity and multi-sector nature of protection and inclusion actions (HDP nexus). The high turnover of staff, particularly international staff, has limited institutional memory and the ability to pass on knowledge within the operation and appears to have generated a degree of fatigue and frustration among national staff.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented below reflect the order of priority established jointly by the evaluation team and UNHCR on the basis of relevance and feasibility criteria for their implementation throughout the multi-year planning period. The evaluation coincided with a staffing review, which analysed the operation's human resources situation in greater depth and made specific recommendations. In this context, the evaluation team and UNHCR have agreed to retain in this report only those recommendations relating to human resources that may complement the findings of the staffing review.

7.1 Strategic level

| National asylum system and extension of protection | |
|--|--|
| RS1 | Strengthen political and institutional advocacy (central and local level) for the updating and adoption of the national law on asylum and make progress in setting up effective protection mechanisms (civil documentation, statelessness) in the context of the international commitments adopted by the GoM and its participation in the World Refugee Forum 2023. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree with the GoM, in particular MIDEK, a joint working mechanism and milestones for updating the draft asylum law, and developing a related capacity-building plan for the development of the national asylum system in the medium term. 2. Intensify institutional and technical work with ANRPTS (ongoing) to resolve difficulties of access to documentation, including simplification of procedures, and explore possible emergency measures to guarantee at least the NIN (as an essential mechanism for protection, access to services and inclusion). 3. Develop an advocacy plan to raise awareness among key institutional actors on asylum, international protection and statelessness in view of the new government cycle (2024), including the executive, legislative and judicial branches and key public administrations (e.g. MIDEK, ANRPTS, national Commission of Human Rights of Mauritania, Ministry of Finance, other sectoral ministries). |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR, RB-MENA (in consultation with national institutions) |

| HDP nexus and national initiatives for the inclusion of refugees | |
|--|---|
| RS2. | Reinforce UNHCR's positioning in the HDP nexus and initiatives for the inclusion of refugee individuals to national institutions, humanitarian and development actors, as well as refugee and host communities, with a view to enhance coordination and resource optimization. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Generate specific data and promote joint analyses (UNHCR, GoM, development actors, WB) on the effects of WB-financed development projects on the refugee population and host communities in the Bassikounou moughaata. |

| | |
|------------|---|
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Analyse with the WB the GoM's access to additional funds in the framework of the IDA20 RSW cycle to: (i) consolidate the sustainability of sectoral interventions, (ii) promote investment and employment in Hodh Chargui; and (iii) make progress in the implementation of commitments made in the framework of the GRF, in particular on the law and the asylum system. 3. Promote and develop coordination and joint programming with other UN agencies within the UNCT, and strengthen specialised human resources in development, in order to: (i) strengthen the integral and multisectoral nature of Mauritania's development interventions and social and economic inclusion, (ii) improve the attractiveness of interventions or programmes granted to donors; and (iii) strengthen advocacy with the private sector to publicise investment opportunities in the Mbera and Bassikounou camps. 4. Communicate UNHCR's role and strategy within the HDP nexus and its vision of the inclusion of refugee populations, social cohesion and its contribution to development to all stakeholders (UN agencies, partners, national institutions and internally). |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR, RB-MENA (in consultation with government institutions, WB, UN agencies, partners) |

7.2 Operational level

| Mbera camp's development | |
|--------------------------|--|
| RO1. | Promote an integrated evolution of the Mbera camp within a territorial development and planning framework with active participation of refugee and host communities, while integrating environmental preservation, climate change-related risks, and a scenario of continuous arrival of Malian refugees. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote a process of discussion and participatory reflection among stakeholders to define a future vision for the Mbera camp that can be incorporated into national and local territorial and development plans and initiatives for the region, with a view in particular to strengthening resilience and social cohesion. The integration of territorial equity, the risks associated with climate change, and the recovery of the environment in and around the Mbera camp should be taken into account. 2. Engage in a dialogue with the relevant institutions to establish ways of improving the quality of construction and materials for existing shelters in the short term; and explore the possibility of granting building permits. 3. To initiate a process of reflection on the evolution of the camp's governance and management model, in consultation with the local authorities and refugee communities, to support the development and integration of the Mbera camp into its environment. 4. To agree with the Mauritanian authorities and representatives of the refugee and host communities on a reception and settlement scenario (temporary and longer-term) in the event of a new influx of refugees, as an alternative to the Mbera camp. |
| Recipients | CO-HCR, (in consultation with government institutions, in particular MIDEDEC and other relevant ministries, local authorities, partners, humanitarian and development actors, representatives of refugees from the Mbera camp and host communities). |

Operational protection

| | |
|------------------|--|
| RO2. | Capitalize on the experiences of different offices to strengthen access to protection and harmonization of procedures where possible. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a protection strategy specific to the context of mixed movements in urban areas, capitalising on the experience and lessons learned in Nouadhibou and on joint work with IOM and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Review UNHCR action plan for community-based protection (Mauritania community-based protection and CwC Roadmap 2022 - 2023, in particular the management of communication mechanisms with communities - e.g. green line, letterbox); and strengthen resources and efforts for its deployment in Bassikounou (with a view to social cohesion) and in urban areas in order to strengthen knowledge of and response to specific vulnerabilities. 2. Advocate with the authorities for recognition of the <i>prima facie</i> procedure in urban areas for refugees previously recognised in Mbera, in order to reduce the pressure of the backlog. |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR (in consultation with national institutions and partners) |

Data to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people with an inclusion approach from the moment they arrive

| | |
|------------------|--|
| RO3. | Establish a system to update profiles of individuals with and for whom UNHCR works, both in Mbera and in urban areas, in order to better document and understand the evolution of socio-economic needs, strengthen advocacy capacity, evidence-based decision-making, as well as enhance the response to the most vulnerable profiles within an inclusion approach. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intensify advocacy and technical support to the Social Register for the inclusion of new arrivals, within a reasonable timeframe (around 6 months), to enable them to have access to the various national basic, social protection and health services according to their level of vulnerability and on the same footing as Mauritanian citizens. 2. Carry out ad hoc surveys of refugees and host communities at the start (baseline) and end of specific key programmes, such as the livelihoods programme, in order to better document the impact of UNHCR's actions and strengthen advocacy. Strengthen the CBI team and strategy, based on the results of systematic PDMS, to facilitate the transition to integration and maintain cash flow in and around the camp. 3. Increase advocacy for the inclusion of refugees in national statistics (sectoral systems, particularly education, national surveys). Promote the disaggregation of (quality) data as an essential aspect of being able to analyse the scope and effectiveness of public social policies on particularly vulnerable profiles and localities. |
| Recipients | CO-HCR (in consultation with CO-HCR Mali, government institutions, partners, humanitarian and development players). |

| Economic inclusion as part of a sustainable development approach (preservation of the environment and the effects of climate change) and social cohesion | |
|---|---|
| RO4. | Strengthen the empowerment and economic inclusion of refugee populations based on social cohesion, sustainable development, and enterprise approach (SMEs and micro-enterprises). |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gradually transform the services provided to the camp community on a voluntary basis, such as the cleaning and maintenance of sanitation facilities, into professionalised services, in order to guarantee their quality over time, recognise and dignify the work carried out, give people opportunities for empowerment and promote the responsabilisation of the camp's refugees. Possible models for remunerating these activities and financing basic services must be analysed beforehand with the participation of the main stakeholders. 2. Strengthen the development of training/employment/self-employment initiatives for refugee and host populations as part of an inclusive market approach and sustainable management of natural resources, in close coordination with local authorities and with the participation of the private sector and International Financing Institutions. Focus on young people, both men and women, and women, particularly heads of household, with a view to strengthening human capital, promoting social cohesion and preventing extremism. 3. Identify opportunities and means for UNHCR to give greater visibility to the positive impact of refugees and investments made in host communities, ensuring in particular that these investments/impacts are subject to regular quantitative and qualitative monitoring. |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR (in consultation with central and local government institutions, partners, humanitarian and development players, the CPPHC and representatives of the camp's refugees). |

| UNHCR position on refugees' access to education and the transfer of the service offered in the Mbera camp to the national public system | |
|--|---|
| RO5. | Strengthen the monitoring system for refugee children's access to education and organize the transfer of camp services to the national system in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including refugees, with a vision of sustainability. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake a thorough mapping exercise to understand the progress made and the challenges in including refugee learners in the national education system. On this basis, develop a concrete transition plan with a model adapted to certain specificities of the Mbera camp, a timetable, clear roles and responsibilities with the Ministry of Education and relevant partners. 2. Strengthen or adapt the national monitoring system, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, to enable regular analysis of the educational situation, take evidence-based decisions and provide timely responses with a view to increasing primary and secondary school attendance and completion, particularly for girls. 3. Generate interest and support from donors for long-term support to the Ministry of Education and refugee communities for inclusion in the national education system, and encourage UNICEF, UNESCO and ILO in their (coordinated and complementary) efforts to promote the inclusion of refugees. |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR (in consultation with central and local government institutions, partners, humanitarian and development players including UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO and representatives of the camp's refugees). |

7.3 Organisational level

| Positioning of UNHCR in Mauritania within the coordination mechanisms for the Sahel region and mixed movements | |
|--|---|
| ROrg1. | Strengthen UNHCR's Mauritania strategic participation with UNHCR in West Africa region to improve coordination and actions related to the Sahel situation and mixed movements. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Structure the participation of the UNHCR office in Mauritania in the analysis and planning mechanisms of the UNHCR Regional Bureau for West Africa in relation to the situation in the Sahel, including access to possible humanitarian response funds for the G5 countries. 2. Consolidate forums for communication, analysis and joint action between UNHCR Mauritania, UNHCR Mali and UNHCR Senegal at a strategic level, taking into account the volatility of the conflict in Mali, the effects of the crisis in the Sahel and mixed movements. 3. Advocate with the institutions of both States (in coordination with UNHCR Mali) to re-launch bilateral communication and the joint working mechanisms of the tripartite agreement, as well as to make progress in implementing solutions for the Mauritanian refugee population in Mali and issues of common interest. |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR (in consultation with RB MENA, RB West Africa, UNHCR Mali, UNHCR Senegal) |

| Human resources | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ROrg2. | Adjust the distribution of human resources within the operation and strengthen the necessary expertise in response to growing needs in terms of protection, inclusion, and the dynamics of location of people with and for whom UNHCR works in various locations. |
| Priority actions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out an internal review of the hierarchical and functional links between the various structures in the country in order to improve coordination and the flow of communication. 2. Establish a dynamic for transmitting knowledge and maintaining institutional memory, as far as possible and with a view to staff rotation. 3. Define a framework for the professional development of national staff. |
| Recipients | CO-UNHCR (Country Office Nouakchott, Field Units Nouadhibou et Néma, Field Office Bassikounou) |

APPENDICES

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Appendix 1 | Terms of reference |
| Appendix 2 | Evaluation matrix |
| Appendix 3 | Timetable |
| Appendix 4 | Organisations surveyed |
| Appendix 5 | Interview guide |
| Appendix 6 | Focus Groups |
| Appendix 7 | Composition of the ERG (Evaluation Reference Group): workshop attendance list |
| Appendix 8 | Diagram of the evaluation governance mechanism |
| Appendix 9 | Limitations encountered and mitigation measures |
| Appendix 10 | Intervention logic for UNHCR operations during the 2020-2022 evaluation period |
| Appendix 11 | Reconstruction of the Theory of Change (ToC) |
| Appendix 12 | Technical note on the analysis of the impact of population growth and agricultural activities on the use of natural resources in the Bassikounou region |
| Appendix 13 | Bibliography |