



# Mauritania Country Strategy Evaluation

## UNHCR Evaluation Office

## Evaluation Brief

**Purpose:** to inform and update the new UNHCR's Mauritania Multi Year Strategy 2024-26.

**Objectives:** 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

**Evaluation type:** Country Strategy Evaluation

**Methods:** Document and data review, key informant semi-structured interviews (146), focus group discussions (10), direct observation, validation, reflection and co-creation workshops (4).

**GOOD PRACTICE >** Watch a [video](#) on how the evaluation integrated the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) approach.

**Implemented:** 2022-2023, by AVICENA and HealthGen

**Scope:** 2020-2022

**Commissioned by:** Evaluation Office

- The GoM's position on asylum and the inclusion of Malian refugees has been crucial for ensuring protection, although some issues have not progressed as planned. Prospects for durable solutions for the main population of Malian refugees are not yet in sight (especially mass return or integration through naturalization).

### **UNHCR's protection and humanitarian response in the camp has been effective overall, but targeting in urban areas remains challenging**

- UNHCR has effectively expanded geographical coverage and adapted operations to provide an effective protection and humanitarian response to a wide variety of protection needs, changing contexts, population profiles, and successive crises.
- The extremely vulnerable situation in the Mbera camp justified the continuation of humanitarian assistance, as well as the shift towards inclusion and empowerment.
- The availability of data concerning the growing urban refugee population is limited, thereby constraining the accuracy and effectiveness of UNHCR's targeted interventions in urban centers (Nouakchott and Nouadhibou).

### **Progress has been made in the response to inclusion in social protection and health care. Education and financial inclusion, however, are still in their early stages; overall is too early to see solid results.**

- 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, sociocultural barriers, and the gradual reduction of humanitarian assistance without a clear improvement in socio-economic conditions in the Mbera camp.
- In terms of education, the inclusion agenda remains, despite all efforts, at its early stages while the situation of refugee children in the Mbera camp has become critical.
- Financial inclusion is also 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 Income Generating Activities as a path to self-reliance and self-employment.

## Evaluation Context

Mauritania experienced an influx of refugees, mainly from Mali, since 2012 due to violence and armed conflict in the neighboring country. At the end of 2022, UNHCR registered over 106,500 people with and for whom UNHCR works, with Malians making up 98% of this population, followed by CAR and Syria. The Mbera camp hosts the majority (82%) of the refugee Malian population and increasingly in urban areas. UNHCR Mauritania collaborates with the Government of Mauritania (GoM) and other partners to coordinate the response to asylum-seekers, refugees and statelessness, operating in an overall favorable protection environment enabled by a general open-door policy. The security situation in Mali, however, remains volatile, making large-scale returns unlikely, whilst new arrivals from Mali continue.

## Key Findings

### **UNHCR leveraged a protection-friendly environment, but durable solutions some way off**

- UNHCR, in support of the GoM, has advanced the protection space and demonstrated responsiveness and flexibility to adapt in its response.

## Refugee status determination, asylum law and reducing statelessness - questions for the long term?

- The 'temporary' delegation of responsibilities from the state to UNHCR on Refugee Status Determination (RSD) and asylum allowed for expanded protection, including in urban areas; however, it may prolong dependence. UNHCR has not had the opportunity to significantly advance the legal framework and institutional capacities.
- Due to contextual factors, it has been challenging to promote a systemic approach to developing the national asylum system, and progress in updating and adopting the national asylum law has been limited.
- The collaboration between UNHCR, the judiciary and relevant GoM authorities helped address statelessness for tens of Mauritanian returnees and their children by providing individual documentation.

## The refugee community played a decisive role in the management of the Mbera camp

- The rather unique and highly developed organization of the communities and the advanced leadership represent an opportunity for UNHCR to enable their further participation in decision-making, in line with AAP approach.
- The evaluation evidenced the refugees' readiness to discuss the transition of certain voluntary services provided by them to professionalized and paid work.

## Progress towards the 'Urbanization' of Mbera camp

- 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 on the evolution of the Mbera camp made it difficult to develop a strategy for its integration into a territorial development plan.

The full Evaluation Report can be found [here](#)



## Recommended Actions

### Strategic level

1. Strengthen political and institutional advocacy for updating and adopting the national asylum law and effective protection mechanisms (civil documentation, statelessness) as per international commitments adopted by the GoM, including its participation in the Global Refugee Forum 2023.
2. Strengthen UNHCR's positioning in the HDP nexus and refugee inclusion initiatives vis-à-vis national institutions, humanitarian and development actors,

### Operational level

3. Promote the development of the Mbera camp within a territorial development and management plan actively involving of refugee and host communities, while integrating environmental preservation, climate change-related risks, and a scenario of continuous arrival of Malian refugees.
4. Capitalize on the experiences of different offices to strengthen access to protection and harmonize procedures where possible.
5. Establish a system to update profiles of individuals with and for whom UNHCR works, both in Mbera and in urban areas, so as to better document and understand evolving socio-economic needs, strengthen advocacy capacity and evidence-based decision-making, as well as reinforce the response to the most vulnerable with an inclusive approach.
6. Strengthen the empowerment and economic inclusion of refugee populations based on social cohesion, sustainable development, and enterprise approach (SMEs and micro-enterprises).
7. Strengthen the monitoring system for refugee children's access to education, and organize the transfer of services from the camp to the national system in consultation with all stakeholders, including refugees, with a vision of sustainability.

### Organisational level

8. Strengthen UNHCR's strategic involvement with the UNHCR West Africa Regional Bureau to improve coordination and action on the Sahel situation and mixed movements.
9. Adjust the distribution of human resources within the operation and strengthen the necessary expertise in relation to the growing needs in terms of protection, inclusion and localization dynamics of people with and for whom UNHCR works.

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