

Working environment

The context

Mauritania hosts some 1,000 refugees from Sudan and other sub-Saharan countries. Most live in the suburbs of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, where they face difficult living conditions and have limited access to the job market.

The Government's refugee status determination (RSD) capacity has increased in recent years. The first ministerial decree confirming refugee status for a group of 38 refugees was issued in early 2008. However, UNHCR continues to conduct targeted RSD when necessary. In 2009, a priority for the Office will be to build the Government's protection capacity.

In June 2007, the Mauritanian Government appealed to an estimated 33,000 of its citizens living as refugees in Senegal and Mali to return home. Some 10,000 are expected to have heeded the call by the end of 2008. UNHCR is working with the Government, NGOs and other partners to ensure the safe and dignified return of these refugees and their initial reintegration.

Many of the returnees have kept in regular contact with their relatives in Mauritania, facilitating their reintegration. However, as the country faces a shortage of natural and other resources, returnee families are adding to the burden on scarce food and water supplies.

The political situation in Mauritania following the *coup d'Etat* of August 2008 remains uncertain and the pace of the repatriation operation remains minimal.

The needs

UNHCR will continue to fulfil its mandate for the 1,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in Mauritania, providing those with specific needs some assistance and ensuring the registration and documentation of all people of concern.

Participatory assessments conducted with urban refugees in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou have identified several priority needs, including better information, and more cooperation with refugee-based community organizations. Other needs include employment opportunities and vocational training, in particular for female heads of households with no other family support.

Refugees also need Arabic language courses to enable them to find employment, while community-based organizations running day-care centres for children need material support. In addition, there is a need to improve responses for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and those with psychological needs.

UNHCR's focus in Mauritania in 2009 will be on voluntary repatriation and the reintegration of Mauritanian refugees returning from Senegal and Mali. The Office will strengthen the absorption capacity of the main returnee areas, and ensure that returnees have the same access to basic services as local communities. Projects which involve both returning and receiving communities are crucial to the success of socio-economic reintegration within larger efforts aimed at national reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

In 2009, some 15,000 people are expected to return to Mauritania, with the total number of returnees expected to be some 25,000 by mid-2009.

Main objectives

Annual programme

- Increase the authorities' capacity to register asylum claims, and to refer an increasing number of claims to the national eligibility body.
- Help the Government to develop a national strategy on migration and asylum management.
- Continue to undertake registration, documentation and targeted RSD.

Supplementary programme

- Ensure that Mauritanian refugees in Senegal and Mali make informed decisions on voluntary return.
- Ensure that returns are conducted in a dignified and safe manner.
- Help returnees to reintegrate into their communities.
- Ensure that the sustainability of reintegration, including returnees' access to shelter, health, education and income generation activities, is made possible by community-based assistance which also benefits local communities, thereby preventing communal tensions.
- Support returnees with specific needs, such as those living with HIV and AIDS, the elderly and female-headed households.
- Assist in building the Government's capacity to respond to protection and recovery needs and strengthen partnerships with humanitarian and development actors.

Key targets

Annual programme

- Asylum-seekers are registered in a timely manner, and targeted RSD is carried out.
- All people of concern are provided with proper documentation.
- All people of concern receive regularly updated leaflets on UNHCR's procedures and have access to national services.
- All persons with specific needs are identified.

Supplementary programme

- Returnees are able to establish their civil status and receive birth certificates; returnees over 15 years of age receive national identity cards.
- The socio-economic reintegration of all returnees is monitored, and problems are addressed by recourse to the appropriate authorities.
- The absorption capacity of receiving communities is increased to facilitate the reintegration of returnees as well as to benefit receiving communities.
- Local communities in areas of return benefit from better health services, and mortality rates are lowered.
- The health and hygiene of returnee families and surrounding communities are ensured through the construction of up to 3,000 traditional sanitary facilities.
- All returnees are provided with the means to build permanent shelters.
- Some 16 educational facilities in areas of high return are rehabilitated and equipped, and 3,600 school children are provided with classroom materials.
- Some 550 teachers provide literacy courses in Arabic and French during the summer holidays for 1,400 returnee children.
- All returnees are helped to become self-sufficient in food.
- Some 71 agricultural projects are implemented with the participation of returnees and local communities.
- Approximately 115 community centres are built with the participation of returnees.
- Some 5,000 returnee and local families are supported through 250 solidarity fund grants.

Strategy and activities

The Office works closely with the Government on capacity building and on the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees in mixed flows. A national NGO partner carries out registration and manages the assistance programme. In 2009, the Office will strengthen existing protection partnerships by helping to set up two government registration offices and by



Mauritanian returnees discussing with UNHCR staff about their children's integration in the national education system with UNHCR staff.

UNHCR/M. De Vriese

donor community. UN agencies have agreed to help with the reintegration of returnees, which is considered a national priority by the Government. UNHCR plans to end its initial reintegration activities by the end of 2009 and will advocate for other UN agencies and development actors to step in. The final returns should take place in June 2009, and reintegration projects will be handed over to the Government and other development actors by the end of December 2009.

Constraints

Access to many returnee sites in the Senegal River valley is severely limited during and following the rainy season, slowing project implementation and limiting UNHCR's and partners' ability to monitor and facilitate the reintegration of returnees.

The political situation in Mauritania remains uncertain. Most development aid has been suspended. Should the repatriation operation continue to be delayed, the concerned population may lose confidence in returning to their home country.

participating in joint training and sensitization initiatives with the administrative and judicial authorities.

Durable solutions for refugees will be pursued where possible through voluntary repatriation and resettlement. The Office will also develop an exit strategy to end long-term assistance to Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in 2009, and look into the possible local integration of these groups.

An emergency response capacity will be maintained to protect refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants rescued from perilous situations at sea or on land.

UNHCR will monitor the repatriation process and work with its partners to ensure returnees receive food and relief items as well as shelter materials upon arrival in their communities of origin. In addition, the Office will closely monitor returnees' access to national identity cards and citizenship rights. Reintegration activities will focus on returnee villages' absorption capacity by improving the availability of water, health care and education. Agricultural and other livelihoods-related projects will also support returnee communities.

The repatriation operation is meant to bring a durable solution to the Mauritanian refugee situation in Senegal and Mali by December 2009. Refugees who decide not to avail of this opportunity will be offered the possibility of local integration in their respective countries of asylum. UNHCR in Senegal and Mali will provide some local integration assistance to help host communities and increase refugees' self-sufficiency.

The *Agence nationale pour l'insertion des réfugiés* (ANAIR) is responsible for providing social and economic support to returnees and for coordinating the disbursement of funds from the Government and the

Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence	
Offices	3
Total staff	26
International	3
National	9
JPOs	1
UNVs	13

Coordination

For the repatriation operation, UNHCR offices in the region will coordinate through regular cross-border meetings and periodic meetings of the tripartite commission. The Office will strengthen coordination with UN and other international agencies, and establish a coordination mechanism with UN agencies and donor representatives. At the governmental level, an inter-ministerial body is charged with overseeing the return and reintegration operations.

Financial information

The annual programme budget for the Mauritania operation has remained around USD 1 million in recent years, in support of an urban refugee case load of some 1,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. A supplementary programme of some USD 7 million was established for the return and reintegration of some 25,000 returnees from Senegal and Mali in 2007 and 2008. In 2009, the budget for the repatriation program will be some USD 9 million.

Partners

Implementing partners

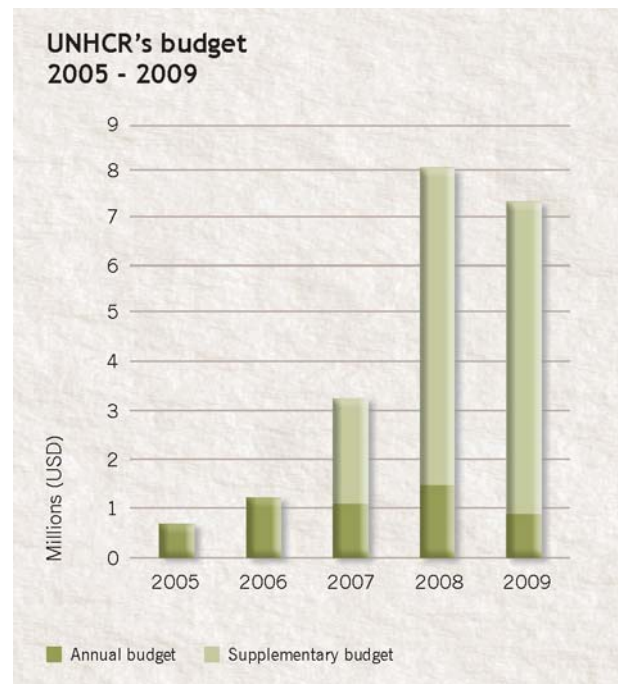
Government agencies: Ministry of Interior; *Agence nationale pour l'insertion des réfugiés* (ANAIR)

NGOs: *Association pour la Lutte contre la pauvreté et le sous développement* (ALPD)

Others: FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO/UNAIDS

Operational partners

World Vision, ACF, MDM



Budget (USD)

Activities and services	2008			2009		
	Annual budget	Supplementary budget Repatriation of Mauritanian refugees	Total	Annual budget	Supplementary budget Repatriation of Mauritanian refugees	Total
Protection, monitoring and coordination	222,195	1,221,453	1,443,648	221,597	795,954	1,017,551
Community services	0	0	0	0	261,000	261,000
Crop production	0	0	0	0	123,484	123,484
Domestic needs	12,548	0	12,548	9,000	530,000	539,000
Education	33,216	0	33,216	32,960	177,031	209,991
Food	12,179	5,356,297	5,368,476	11,700	95,362	107,062
Health	20,225	0	20,225	35,884	160,000	195,884
Income generation	19,117	0	19,117	4,000	240,000	244,000
Legal assistance	38,310	0	38,310	65,017	845,438	910,455
Operational support (to agencies)	33,768	0	33,768	25,592	641,018	666,610
Sanitation	0	0	0	0	250,000	250,000
Shelter and infrastructure	52,090	0	52,090	44,460	1,872,315	1,916,775
Transport and logistics	8,120	0	8,120	960	300,000	300,960
Water	0	0	0	0	200,000	200,000
Total operations	451,768	6,577,750	7,029,518	451,170	6,491,602	6,942,772
Programme support	446,135	0	446,135	470,255	0	470,255
Total	897,903	6,577,750	7,475,653	921,425	6,491,602	7,413,027

Note: Supplementary programme budgets exclude 7 per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.