



**EMPOWERING WOMEN  
COMMUNITY LEADERS TO EXPAND  
PARTICIPATION AND ACCESS TO  
EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AND  
BASIC SERVICES FOR REFUGEES AT  
HEIGHTENED PROTECTION RISK**

**Promising Practice  
in Community-Based Protection  
in Mauritania**



This document is intended for general distribution. All rights reserved. Reproductions and translations are permitted, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

© United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, February 2024

**Cover photograph:** UNHCR representative in Mauritania and CBP staff in Mauritania, along with members of the 'Femmes Ressources' initiative, visiting the new office of the “Comité des Femmes Ressources” Community initiative located in Mbera refugee camp.

**Photo credit:** © UNHCR/Omar Doukali

**Title:** Empowering women community leaders to expand participation and access to emergency assistance and basic services for refugees at heightened protection risk<sup>1</sup>

**Type of practice:** Case study

**Programme objective:** To enhance access to emergency assistance and basic services for persons at heightened protection risk by strengthening the Comité des Femmes Ressources's protection and outreach capacities

**Dates:** September 2022 to March 2023

**Population groups:** Community-based organizations led by forcibly displaced women in Mauritania, as well as the communities in which they work, including refugees and asylum-seekers at heightened risk and host community members



## Programme overview

The Comité des Femmes Ressources is a women-led community-based organization of refugees living in the Mbera Camp in Mauritania. Ninety-eight Malian refugee women from diverse ethnic backgrounds and age groups are helping [refugees at heightened protection risk](#) due to their circumstances or characteristics (including medical conditions, living with a disability, gender, age, diversity characteristics, etc.) and the context (e.g. discrimination due to these characteristics, difficult living conditions increasing the likelihood of violence, etc.) to gain access to assistance and specialized services.

UNHCR provides small-scale flexible funding within the framework of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Regional Bureau [Accountability to Affected People \(AAP\) Grant](#), as well as office space, equipment and technical support and capacity development for the identification of protection risks and responses. This support has allowed this grass-roots group to consolidate as an organization and become a protection actor relied upon by its peers and other humanitarian actors in the refugee camp. Through door-to-door visits and awareness-raising sessions, members of the Comité des Femmes Ressources identified 250 persons facing heightened protection risks, who were referred to UNHCR for individual case management and assistance. They also accompanied and facilitated access to essential social services available in Mbera camp, such as health and education for persons with reduced mobility (due to age, disability and other health conditions).

<sup>1</sup> The term “persons at heightened protection risk” refers to persons who face specific barriers to the exercise of their rights due to the intersection of their personal characteristics with the environments, and who require specific targeted actions in order to enjoy all of their human rights. Individuals in the following categories are generally considered to be at heightened risk: girls and boys, including unaccompanied and separated children; persons with serious health conditions; persons with special legal or physical protection needs; single women; women-headed households; older persons; persons with disabilities and persons of diverse sex, sexual orientation or gender identity (LGBTIQ+ individuals). See [UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms](#).



Thanks to this initiative, refugee women themselves are taking part in the humanitarian response in a more visible, structured and sustainable manner. They have continued to implement their core activities beyond the duration of the grant and their work is raising awareness about the importance of women's rights and their participation in camp discussions as equal members of the community. Also, the participation of the Comité des Femmes Ressources in the Camp Coordination Committee<sup>2</sup> and its greater collaboration with other stakeholders within the community have increased women's voices in decision-making processes and strengthened the humanitarian response for different age, gender and diversity (AGD) groups that often tend to be marginalized or excluded.

## Context

As of January 2024, Mauritania was hosting over 118,503 refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>3</sup> This included close to 105,000 Malian refugees in the arid southeast region of Hodh Changui, where the Mbera refugee camp is located.<sup>4</sup> In 2022, UNHCR Mauritania witnessed an influx of around 12,000 refugees from Mali, of whom 56 per cent were women and children in dire

need of protection and basic services following the deterioration of security conditions in the neighbouring country.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the refugee population in Mbera camp is currently the highest it has been since the camp was established in 2012, reaching 104,197 as of January 2024,<sup>6</sup> exerting pressure on basic and social services available at the camp.



*Mbera view of all data collected, used to display and analysis of different camp management topic.*  
© UNHCR

<sup>2</sup> The Mbera Camp Coordination Committee is composed of 12 members including: 4 male zone leaders and 4 female zone leaders (who are also members of the Executive Board of Femmes Ressources); 1 camp coordinator; 1 camp youth representative; 2 camp women's representatives (who also serve as the Representative and Deputy Representative of Femmes Ressources).

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR Operational Data Portal. [Mauritania - Registered refugees and asylum seekers as of 1 January 2024](#)

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR Operational Data Portal. [Dashboard Mbera camp - Refugees registered and awaiting registration - January 2024](#)

<sup>5</sup> Annual Results Report 2022 Mauritania

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR Operational Data Portal. [Dashboard Mbera camp - Refugees registered and awaiting registration - January 2024](#)

UNHCR oversees camp management in Mbera in collaboration with funded partners, grass-roots organizations and other governmental and humanitarian actors. A traditional and solid refugee coordination structure has been

active in the camp for many years, alongside a growing number of dynamic volunteer groups (e.g. brigades for waste management, fire prevention and management and environmental protection).<sup>7</sup>



### **Femmes Resources leader, Zeinabo, shares knowledge and wisdom to empower other women in Mbera Refugee Camp**

In her home country, Mali, Zeinabo learned how to sew, dye and make soap. She has transferred her knowledge and skills to other women in Mbera refugee camp to enhance their capacity for self-sufficiency. Her leadership and dedication have earned her the trust and recognition of women of her neighbourhood, who have elected her to represent them in camp affairs. Reflecting on her impaired foot, she says that it does not prevent her from doing what she wants with her life.

© UNHCR/Malika Diagana

Women community leaders, organized through the [refugee-led organization \(RLO\)](#) the Comité des Femmes Ressources, hereinafter “Femmes Ressources”, have been a crucial part of the refugee representation mechanisms in place in Mbera Camp since 2012. Composed of 98 members, covering the 4 zones and 44 blocks in the camp (1 representative and 1 vice-representative in each zone and each block), members of Femmes Ressources provided liaison between communities, humanitarian actors and the government<sup>8</sup> by acting as main focal points of information and assistance to women, children and people subject to heightened protection risks and routing their feedback to the Camp Coordination Committee.

Moreover, by sharing information on women and children’s rights at community level, to prevent child labour, child marriage and gender-based violence (including female genital mutilation),

they have contributed to increased school retention and the participation of women in decision-making processes within their communities. Also, Femmes Ressources leaders come from different AGD groups, including ethnic groups (Tuareg, Peuhl, Arab, Bambara, Songhai), and belong to different age and linguistic groups. They are therefore able to engage with the whole camp population, including AGD groups, as part of their daily work.

Despite its efforts and access to displaced communities, the outreach capacities of Femmes Ressources have been limited by a number of factors, including:

- a. An absence of adequate supplies to enhance its visibility and protection against the desert’s high temperatures and sandy terrains;
- b. A lack of financial resources and essential

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR Operational Data Portal. [Mental Health and psychosocial support in Mbera refugee camp – January 2022](#)

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR and its partners have provided various services in the Mbera camp. Water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH) and protection services are provided exclusively by UNHCR. Health services are provided by the Ministry of Health with the assistance of UNHCR and its partners. Education services are provided by UNHCR, UNICEF and their partners under the lead of the Ministry of National Education. Concerning social protection, TAAZOUR (General Delegation of National Solidarity and Combat against Exclusion) is leading the response in Mbera camp, with the assistance of UNHCR. Regarding livelihoods, UNHCR receives support from several donors, including development actors, like GIZ, and collaborates with financial institutions to provide these services, along with International Labour Organisation (ILO).

infrastructure for permanent operations (working space and basic office equipment, etc.);

- c. Low income and literacy levels among members, as well as little expertise in resource management, being an impediment to attracting internal and external funding;
- d. Women's lower levels of education and the negative outcomes of cultural beliefs and practices, which limit the effective representation of women in decision-making positions.

Against this background, the [UNHCR MENA AAP Grant](#) offered a way forward in terms of further building on the existing capabilities of Femmes Ressources and enhancing its outreach capacities and organizational development, so that it could assume an even greater role in the protection response in the Mbera camp for **persons at higher risk of discrimination and exclusion across AGD groups**. Persons with specific needs are often less visible and confronted with multiple forms of discrimination due to intersecting and multifaceted diversity factors. They may also be difficult to reach because of the size of the camp, or may be afraid to talk about their situation for the risk of further marginalization.

For these reasons, targeted efforts are required to improve identification of such persons and provide specific support or regular follow up at their homes to ensure that they have equal access to assistance. Such efforts are more effective when implemented through a community-based approach, as refugees themselves are best placed to understand their challenges, capacities and solutions. Organizations such as Femmes Ressources play that fundamental protection liaison role at the Mbera camp.

The [UNHCR MENA AAP Grant](#) is a flexible funding tool that was first introduced in 2021. It targets community-based or grassroots organizations running small-scale projects with a maximum budget of \$4,000 that strengthen the AAP

aspects of diversity, inclusion and accessibility of information and services for people at heightened protection risk.

As part of the process, UNHCR operations assisted interested organizations in submitting a project proposal by means of a short online application form. These proposals underwent assessment by the MENA AAP Reference Group<sup>9</sup>, which subsequently awarded grants upon endorsement of the project. UNHCR Mauritania and participating organizations conducted individual joint assessments to identify key operational conditions that could be boosted using the grant, to sustain and expand the reach of services the organizations were already providing. Given the lack of resources of these organizations, some formal requirements (e.g. having a bank account) were eased to facilitate access to the grants, with operations taking charge of procurement and distribution of the resources provided.

This grant to Femmes Ressources aimed to:

- Foster access to basic services available in the Mbera Camp (education, health, registration) for persons at heightened protection risk by strengthening the protection and outreach capacity of Femmes Ressources to identify, support and refer cases
- Promote the effective participation of populations at heightened risk of discrimination and exclusion in community representation structures and camp coordination mechanisms, through improved consultation and feedback mechanisms (awareness-raising campaigns, focus group discussions, door-to-door visits, etc.)
- Enhance the self-reliance of Femmes Ressources by providing financial and technical support to improve operating conditions, as well as to strengthen visibility and collaboration with UNHCR and other humanitarian actors.

<sup>9</sup> The MENA AAP Reference Group, established in 2021 by the UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau, aims to promote equal participation and access to AAP mechanisms. It contextualizes the UNHCR AGD Policy, UNHCR Operational Guidance on AAP, IACS's Commitments on Accountability to Affected People 2017, and UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026. The group supports community-based and grassroots organizations across the region in implementing projects to enhance equal access to AAP and protection.



## ➤ Resources and partnerships

UNHCR provided office space for Femmes Ressources in the camp, equipped with a laptop, basic office furniture (desks, chairs, carpets) and stationery items. Given the challenges associated with transferring funds, including limited access to banking and phone services, this support was provided by UNHCR in the form of direct in-kind contributions to the organization. This dedicated office space meant that Femmes Ressources was better able to organize its work and activities and had a fixed location at which meetings could be set up with other actors and community organizations. Having a workspace at a central place in the camp also facilitated the implementation of a daily rotation of teams of 10 to 15 women who conduct outreach activities (including informative sessions and door-to-door visits) in a designated zone of the camp, as follows: Mondays: Zone 1; Tuesdays: Zone 2; Wednesdays: Zone 3; Thursdays: Zone 4; and Fridays: all zones.

UNHCR also arranged the provision of visibility items (e.g. a logo, high visibility vests, etc.), which were used by Femmes Ressources members in their communication materials and to enhance their organizational identity. Other office expenses, including a security guard,

were covered by Femmes Ressources through voluntary cash contributions from its members.

UNHCR Mauritania oversaw the project design and implementation process, in close coordination with Femmes Ressources, from the Bassikounou Sub-Office (SO) due to its proximity to the Mbera refugee camp. Following assessments of the organization's training needs, UNHCR developed refresher training on protection-related topics, including community-based protection, gender-based violence (GBV) and referral pathways to specialized services within the camp, child protection, age, gender and diversity (AGD) mainstreaming and AAP, among others, in collaboration with non-governmental organization (NGO) protection partners.

UNHCR held weekly coordination meetings with Femmes Ressources staff members to address obstacles and concerns and review data collected on persons at heightened risk (see Activity 2 for more information). The Office also arranged for mobile data to be provided so that Femmes Ressources focal points in each camp zone could reach UNHCR by phone and report emergency situations if necessary.



*Group photo featuring the Swiss Ambassador based in Dakar, UNHCR representative in Mauritania and UNHCR staff together with "Comité des Femmes Ressources" Community initiative team within their office in Mbera Camp.*

© UNHCR/Omar Doukali

# Process and activities

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT ON GRANT APPLICATION PROCESS

Following the UNHCR MENA Regional Bureau's 2022 call for expressions of interest in the Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Grant, protection staff at the Bassikounou SO introduced the grant opportunity for refugee-led associations committed to the protection of groups at heightened risk of marginalization and discrimination in the camp, namely Femmes Ressources and SOS Nomade, and offered support in the application process. UNHCR and Femmes Ressources then held bilateral discussions to determine what needs and gaps their project sought to address and through which activities and resources.

Building on these preliminary project ideas, UNHCR organized structured meetings with Femmes Ressources focal points to jointly address each project component contained in the standard grant proposal template. This tailored support and capacity-sharing had the objective of strengthening the project planning skills of Femmes Ressources and laying the foundations for its engagement in fundraising opportunities with other donors.

## IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL OF REFUGEES AT HEIGHTENED PROTECTION RISK

UNHCR provided guidance to members of Femmes Ressources on how to identify, consult and guide persons or groups at higher risk (also known as persons with [specific protection needs](#)<sup>10</sup>) in camp settings, based on age, gender and diversity considerations, health conditions and disability, as well as any combination thereof. The information was collected through several channels:

- Requests for information or assistance submitted by persons seeking Femmes Ressources services through its central office or through Femmes Ressources focal points covering a given camp zone.
- Outreach through door-to-door visits by members of Femmes Ressources throughout the camp. Their knowledge of the local context and acceptance by the community

facilitated access to and communication with households. The visits enabled members of Femmes Ressources to identify new individuals in need of services and to update information on households registered as having members with specific protection needs.

- Direct interaction with refugees, who were reached through awareness-raising activities. The information gathered during these activities, as with the outreach visits, depended on the activity's focus and audience. Data collected included the availability of services in the camp, child vaccination, risks relating to female genital mutilation and the importance of education for all children.

<sup>10</sup> Although the term is often used by UNHCR, the organization recommends avoiding it to the extent that it has a disempowering connotation. More guidance available at: [Overview Persons at Risk | UNHCR](#)



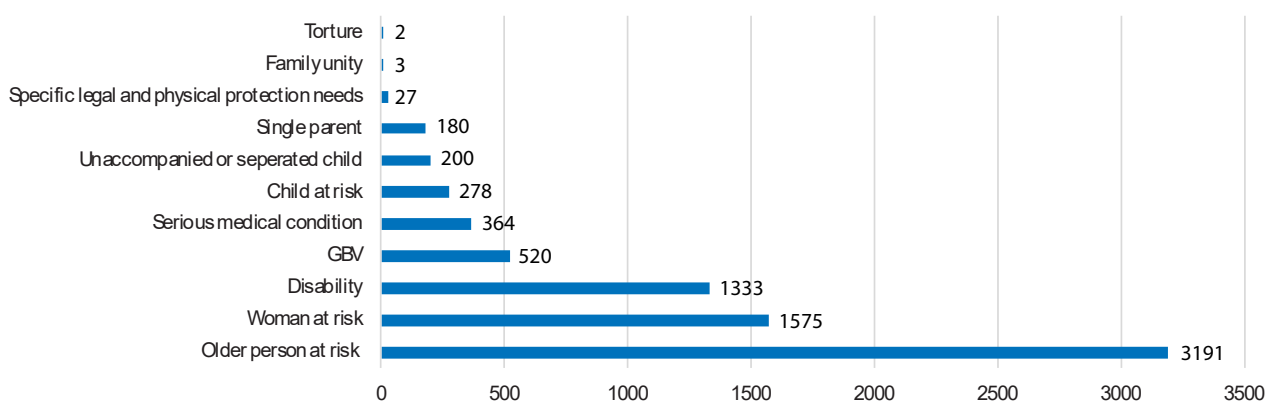
The data collected by Femmes Ressources on persons at higher risk was compiled in lists shared periodically with UNHCR during coordination meetings. The information was then included in the UNHCR standard referral pathways<sup>11</sup> for individual management and assistance (where applicable), in collaboration with protection partners and social services providers.

UNHCR staff systematized and updated the collected data according to the UNHCR [guidance on specific needs codes](#) and integrated it into the UNHCR case management database, ProGres. Information on persons in Mbera camp registered

by UNHCR as having specific protection needs is released periodically through the operational data portal.<sup>12</sup>

The following chart provides an overview of refugees registered by UNHCR in Mbera camp across protection needs categories, as of 31 July 2023. It includes 250 individuals identified and referred to UNHCR by Femmes Ressources during the project implementation phase (October 2022 to March 2023), although the actual number of cases collected by Femmes Ressources has increased because its collaboration with UNHCR is ongoing:

### Total persons with specific protection needs: 6,847



## 3 FACILITATING ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE CAMP FOR PERSONS AT RISK

Given the long distances within the camp, the project budget included transportation expenses to support and facilitate the access of persons with reduced mobility to basic services available in Mbera camp, mainly health and education. The main profiles of persons supported by Femmes Ressources in this component of the project included:

- ▶ Children with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities, with support to improve school

retention: this entailed liaising with the school community to promote adaptation measures and an inclusive environment.

- ▶ Pregnant women: Femmes Ressources supported women facing obstacles in accessing maternity health care<sup>13</sup> because they had not been officially registered as refugees with the governmental authorities. In these cases, Femmes Ressources accompanied the women to the registration

<sup>11</sup> Consisting of preliminary evaluation by UNHCR staff; crosscheck with data contained in the internal registration database (ProGres); referral to protection partner for additional interviews/documentation (if needed); provision of assistance.

<sup>12</sup> The dashboard as of October 2023 can be consulted through this link: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/104873>

<sup>13</sup> The health centres operating at Mbera refugee camp are run by Mauritania's Ministry of Health.

centres and interceded on their behalf to expedite the process.

- Older persons with disabilities or health conditions who lacked economic and social support from their families.

Besides supporting individual cases, Femmes Ressources leveraged its knowledge of persons at heightened protection risk and its constant interaction with them to convey their concerns to UNHCR and service providers regarding key challenges faced in accessing essential social services.

## 4 AWARENESS-RAISING AND CONSULTATIONS WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Femmes Ressources set to strengthen collaboration with the camp's Committee of Persons with Disabilities<sup>14</sup> as a tool to enhance its outreach and support vis-à-vis refugees with disabilities, as well as their participation in camp coordination mechanisms. Prior to the launch of the project, the Committee was not actively engaged in camp activities and discussions due to mobility constraints faced by some of its members. To address this situation, Femmes Ressources leaders organized an awareness-raising session with the Committee's members in December 2022 to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disabilities. To promote attendance, Femmes Ressources oversaw the logistical arrangements involved.

During the event, Femmes Ressources members made a presentation on the objectives and services offered by their organization. This was important in order to earn the trust of persons with disabilities, as several Committee members were not aware of the activities of Femmes Ressources in the camp or how to approach them if necessary. The meeting contributed to raising awareness of the importance of revitalizing the Committee in order to enhance the participation and leadership of persons with disabilities in the refugee representation mechanisms in the camp.

As a result of these initial consultations, it was agreed to hold focus group discussions with persons with disabilities and their family members

to collect feedback and agree on actions to address the identified challenges. Femmes Ressources has adopted this participatory methodology (focus group discussions) to engage with community members on a monthly basis as part of its core activities, along with UNHCR and NGO partner organizations.

Femmes Ressources leaders have also developed information campaigns and awareness-raising sessions directed at different AGD groups in the camp. For instance, in August 2023, they reached out to newly arrived refugees with information on essential services and support mechanisms available at the camp, scheduling additional awareness-raising sessions with women and children on gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, inter alia.



*Discussion between members of the "Comité des Femmes Ressources" Community initiative, UNHCR representative in Mauritania, the Swiss ambassador based in Dakar, and UNHCR CBP colleagues in front of the association's office in Mbera Camp. © UNHCR/Omar Doukali*

<sup>14</sup> Camp committees at Mbera are groups within the camp population that have a specific sector or cross-cutting focus and have a consultative role vis-à-vis the camp coordination structure.

With the support of UNHCR, a training session was organized to strengthen individuals' capacities to develop income generation activities. Despite some setback, the committee board of Femmes Ressources (six women),

received an extensive training in microcredit and microfinance projects in May 2023. The personalized assistance to nine individuals has not yet been made possible.

## Achievements, results and impact

During the implementation of the grant, which spanned from October 2022 until March 2023, **Femmes Ressources contributed to the identification and registration of 250 persons at heightened protection risk, in the UNHCR data management system.** Most of these individuals were women, older persons,<sup>15</sup> or persons with disabilities and individuals with serious medical conditions.

A key result of the project is that despite being a small-scale, short-term intervention, the grant enabled a grass-roots association of women community representatives to address key organizational needs and further develop protection capacities in order to become an operational refugee-led organization relied upon by its peers and other humanitarian actors at the Mbera refugee camp.

The provision of an office space with furniture, one computer and communication materials has significantly enhanced the visibility and outreach capacity of the organization. By having a central workspace in which to meet and coordinate activities among members, Femmes Ressources was able to successfully implement a weekly rotation system whereby representatives covered

designated zones and blocs in the camp and conducted regular door-to door visits. As a result, Femmes Ressources members are better known and more accessible to persons at heightened risk of discrimination and exclusion because of age, gender and diversity factors, including minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) persons and persons with disabilities. Moreover, individuals facing protection risks can receive information and guidance on how to access services in a private setting (the Femmes Ressources office or their own households) that is more conducive to the disclosure of sensitive information.

With UNHCR guidance, Femmes Ressources submitted a grant proposal aiming to **expand beyond its initial work on women and children's rights to include other persons with specific protection needs.** To achieve this goal, Femmes Ressources received specialized training organized by UNHCR to enhance its technical capacity to work on protection issues and with other population groups, including persons with disabilities, older persons and individuals with serious medical conditions. As a result, Femmes Ressources also increased collaboration with other stakeholders within

<sup>15</sup> **Women at risk** include a woman of 18 years old or over who is at risk because of her gender, including: single mother, single caregiver; widow; older woman; woman with disabilities; survivors of violence; single woman (without partner, unmarried, widowed, divorced or separated, and without children); woman in the period of lactation. **Older person at risk:** refers to persons 60 years over who have specific need(s) in addition to their age, including: single older persons, older couples; suffers from health problems; lacks psychological, physical, economic, social or other support from family members or others; without any family members in the country of asylum; sole caregiver to children (related or non-related).



the community (e.g. the camp's committee of persons with disabilities) to strengthen the response to these groups, increase participation in the identification and design of responses and benefit from income-generation training, all of which gave these individuals a greater sense of being taken into consideration as equal members of the community.

Expansion of the scope of the protection and outreach activities of Femmes Ressources **increased the organization's visibility within the camp** and led to more members of the community being aware of its existence and the protection role it could play. This led to the participation of Femmes Ressources in the Camp Coordination Committee,<sup>16</sup> which increased consideration of women's voices in decision-making processes in the camp. As a result, more women are now more aware of their rights and feel more empowered to speak up and raise their concerns within the community, despite prevailing social norms that privilege men's opinions. Also, by having a women-led organization as a positive model, women in the community are coming closer together and the younger generations are more willing to engage in community discussions and actions to improve living conditions in the camp.

The presence of Femmes Ressources in the community has also become a point of reference for other stakeholders, including other humanitarian agencies and donors, who often meet with the organization during camp visits to learn more about the situation in the community. Local authorities and NGOs also approach Femmes Ressources as a bridge to reach persons at heightened risk. For example, three board members of Femmes Ressources accompanied local authorities as part of the second socioeconomic survey conducted at the Mbera camp in June 2023, facilitating the collection of data on persons with specific protection needs. Thanks to this initiative, more

than 600 persons with disabilities or serious medical conditions, and older persons, were surveyed. The first iteration of this survey took place between April and June 2021 and resulted in the categorization of all refugee populations in the camp (14,012 households) into three vulnerability categories; of these, Group 1, the most vulnerable households, have since been receiving cash assistance provided by the National Social Registry, a project funded by the World Bank,<sup>17</sup> every three months. The results of the second iteration of this survey have not yet been released.

The UNHCR MENA AAP Grant has contributed to the sustainability of the activities of Femmes Ressources beyond its implementation period. The provision of office space and the development of the technical capacities of Femmes Ressources concerning protection have made it possible for the various services to continue even after finalization of the grant. Femmes Ressources is still conducting door-to-door visits and refers protection cases to UNHCR and other actors in the camp. It also conducts monthly focus groups discussions with persons with disabilities and continues to participate in the Camp Coordination Committee. The MENA Grant also supported Femmes Ressources in enhancing its fundraising skills and it was recently selected to run a pilot project called "Cooltainer4refugees" by the Africa Green Tech (AGT) Foundation, which will roll out in early 2024.

The **project has also complemented the UNHCR community-based protection and AAP strategy in Mauritania**. Refugee women themselves are taking part in the humanitarian and development response, reaching households in remote parts of the camp and bringing local knowledge and the voices of people with specific needs to planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes.

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>17</sup> See the results of the first iteration of the survey here: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90629>

## Lessons



### ENABLING FACTORS

- 💡 Femmes Ressources members and the people we work with and for in the Mbera camp are part of the same community. Their long-standing presence at the camp, coupled with the community-ties and leadership and dedication, have earned them credibility and respect with their peers.
- 💡 Prior to the UNHCR MENA AAP Grant, Femmes Ressources had designated community representatives in every zone and block of the Mbera camp, for a total of 98 members of the community. The high number of women representatives facilitated the creation of a rotation mechanism to ensure that the organization could reach the entire camp.
- 💡 UNHCR has worked with Mauritanian authorities and partners to ensure that all refugees have equal access to all services provided. UNHCR has consistently supported women's participation in decision-making and women were fully consulted in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes.



*Focus group discussion between UNHCR representative in Mauritania, the Swiss Ambassador based in Dakar, and the refugee women leaders representing the "Comité des Femmes Ressources" Community initiative in Mbera Camp.*

© UNHCR



## ADVERSE FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS

- Femmes Ressources is a volunteer-based organization and some of the members face significant challenges in meeting their basic needs, which affects their availability to participate in the organization's various activities in a sustainable and predictable manner. This situation is further complicated by the fact that there are limited livelihood opportunities in the camp and urban centres are distant.
- Household chores and community-based activities are not equally shared between men and women. Women and girls are typically responsible for household duties and childcare and thus face obstacles to actively engaging in "out-of-house" activities, such as participation in community-led organizations.
- Persons at heightened protection risk are still underrepresented in community structures, including Camp Coordination Committees, and are thus not able to voice their specific concerns more directly. In general, there is a lack of active community involvement to support people at heightened protection risk.
- The traditionally lower levels of education and proficiency in French for women than men in Mali (due to social and cultural norms) continue to challenge women's access to equal opportunities.<sup>18</sup>
- Environmental and weather conditions in the camp, such as extreme heat and lack of shade, make outreach activities more physically demanding.



*Outside view of Comité des Femmes Ressources office space provided by UNHCR in the Mbera refugee camp.*  
© UNHCR/Omar Doukali

<sup>18</sup> Inside the camp, there are two literacy programmes targeting adults: one from Save the Children and one from RET; according to the latest numbers shared by the partners, 350 of the 953 learners are women. However, there are only a few learners over 40, which is the average age of members of femmes ressources. For the majority of cases, these women (femmes ressources) are either heads of households or responsible for multi-member households. Therefore, a more tailored literacy support solution should be sought.



## Tips for replication and scaling up

- ✓ Continued support for capacity development and resource identification after completion of the project contributes to ensuring the sustainability of activities run by community-based organizations.
- ✓ Supporting existing community-based structures and their activities increases the impact of small-scale grants and the sustainability of interventions. In addition, identifying community organizations that are working with communities on the priority areas mapped by UNHCR increases the possibilities for refugees to be part of humanitarian and development strategies and responses.
- ✓ Promote the role of community-based structures as entry points for access to basic services and livelihoods activities should be enhanced.
- ✓ Analysis of power, gender, and intersectional factors within the community are key to identifying gaps, building on strengths and working on weaknesses, without destabilizing community dynamics.
- ✓ Investment in digital literacy and access to electronic devices and the Internet can improve communication with communities and outreach.

## Next steps

Femmes Ressources will continue working with UNHCR and other partners to enhance the safe identification of persons at heightened protection risk, their referral to UNHCR and its partners and their access to services, as well as to strengthen their representation in community structures at the Mbera Camp. To this end, UNHCR will continue to provide Femmes Ressources with technical support and to hold regular coordination meetings with the organization to discuss ways in which groups at heightened risk can overcome barriers to exercising rights and accessing services; and how to more effectively raise the awareness of

authorities, service providers and communities regarding individuals with need of specific services.

UNHCR Mauritania plans to continue supporting the self-sufficiency of Femmes Ressources by assessing and responding to key training needs and raising the awareness of donors and developmental actors regarding the importance of its work. UNHCR Mauritania also intends to support Femmes Ressources in acquiring legal status as a non-profit association to further consolidate its organizational development.

For more information please contact:

Division of International Protection  
Community-based Protection Unit

[hqts00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqts00@unhcr.org)

Regional Bureau for Middle East and North Africa

[jorammenacbp@unhcr.org](mailto:jorammenacbp@unhcr.org)

UNHCR Mauritania

[mauno@unhcr.org](mailto:mauno@unhcr.org)

[georgopo@unhcr.org](mailto:georgopo@unhcr.org)

