

MAURITANIA

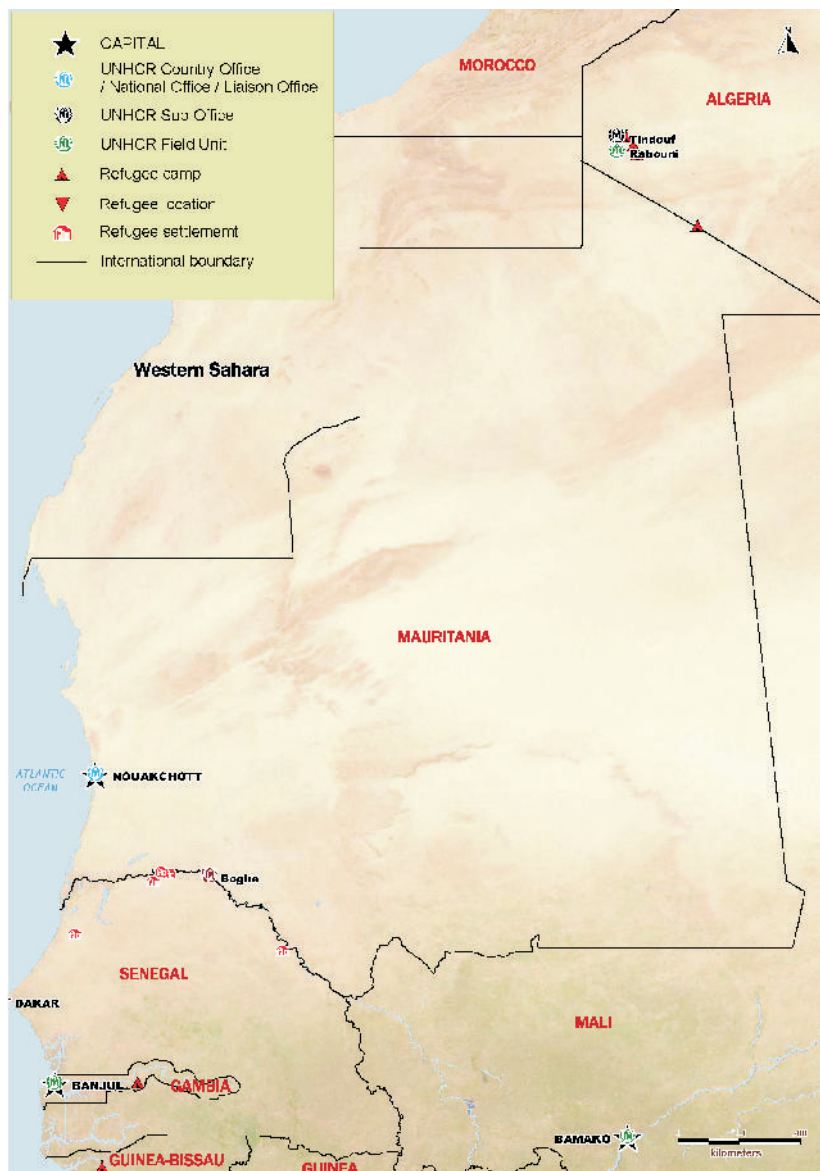
Operational highlights

- The Mauritanian authorities recognized a total of 111 refugees, and 59 asylum claims were still pending at the end of the year. UNHCR submitted the claims of 40 asylum-seekers, of whom the Minister of the Interior and Decentralization (MIDEC) recognized 21 as refugees.
- The current laws do not provide effective protection to asylum-seekers, who are often confused with illegal migrants by immigration authorities at border points. A new draft law on foreigners and asylum has been shared with UNHCR for comments. During the year, UNHCR focused on strengthening the monitoring of reception arrangements at the borders to allow for the prompt identification of people in need of protection within mixed migratory flows.
- UNHCR redoubled efforts to build the capacity of governmental and NGO partners on reception and registration procedures. A joint training programme on international protection was organized in collaboration with MIDEC and involved police as well as members of civil society, including judges and lawyers. Training sessions and workshops on detention, *non-refoulement* and refugee documentation took place in Nouakchott, Nouadhibou and Rosso.
- During 2009 UNHCR assisted some 12,000 Mauritanian refugees to return from Senegal, bringing the total number of returnees to over 19,000 since January 2008.

Working environment

As a result of the security situation and a terrorist alert throughout the country, the Mauritanian authorities strengthened surveillance and adopted strict security

measures which affected nationals as well as foreigners, including refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. The authorities initiated a review of documentation procedures which slowed delivery of identity documents. In some cases, IDs already delivered were withdrawn and the issuance of other documents was blocked. Refugees, including Sierra Leoneans who chose to remain in the country after the invocation of the cessation clause on 31 December 2008, and Mauritanian returnees, were particularly penalized by the



Persons of concern

Type of population	Origin	Total	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Various	800	500	35	29
People in a refugee-like situation	Western Sahara	26,000	-	-	-
Asylum-seekers	Various	120	-	31	17
Returnees (refugees)	Senegal	12,000	12,000	53	60
Total		38,920	12,500		

adoption of such measures. UNHCR advocated for a prompt resumption of the delivery of documents, receiving assurances that this would be done upon completion of an overall verification exercise in early 2010.

New controls on irregular migratory movements through Mauritania resulted in some cases of asylum-seekers being arrested. The authorities granted UNHCR's implementing partner regular access to the detention centre in Nouadhibou. As a result of regular monitoring, no cases of *refoulement* occurred in 2009, although 16 individuals were expelled to the Senegalese border. Twelve Ivorian asylum-seekers threatened with deportation were freed following UNHCR's intervention.

UNHCR and its partners face challenges in areas of return, including shortages of potable water, lack of health and educational facilities, and low agricultural productivity. The issue of food security is a major concern in Mauritania and affects both returnees and the local population.

| Achievement and impact |

● Main objectives

UNHCR's main objectives in Mauritania were to ensure the safe and dignified repatriation of Mauritania refugees

from Senegal to their regions of origin; assist in reintegration to ensure a sustainable return; provide protection and, whenever needed, assistance to refugees and others of concern; and seek durable solutions for refugees. The Office also aimed to help build the Government's capacity to respond to protection and recovery needs and strengthen partnerships with humanitarian and development actors.

● Protection and solutions

Despite the enormous logistical challenges, a relatively high no-show rate and heavy flooding over several months in the return areas, by December 2009 more than 19,000 Mauritanian refugees had returned home. Of these, 12,000 people returned in 49 convoys during 2009. The total number of returnees so far is 80 per cent of the planning figure of 24,000 persons.

In view of the inadequate conditions in areas of return, including shortages of potable water, general food insecurity, lack of health and educational facilities, and low agricultural productivity, UNHCR aimed to improve the living conditions of both returnees and host communities through its reintegration programme and through coordination with the authorities and NGOs.



Returnees digging holes for the foundations of new houses.

At the end of 2009, 88 per cent of returnees had access to potable water, 63 per cent had received latrine kits, 76 per cent had adequate housing and 41 per cent had participated in income-generating activities. However, only 49 per cent of returnee children were enrolled in school. These children were offered catch-up classes in Arabic to overcome the language barrier.

Some 24 per cent of returnees had a Mauritanian ID card upon their arrival. UNHCR aimed to help build the necessary administrative capacity to register all returnees and to deliver birth certificates and ID cards for those who did not have them. In 2009, 58 per cent of returnees received birth certificates and 53 per cent got ID cards, bringing the total of adult returnees with ID cards to 77 per cent. Nevertheless, significant delays in the documentation process left many returnees undocumented.

All returnee families were entitled to a plot of land of between 200 and 900 square metres and a land occupation permit upon arrival. Almost half the families had received both by the end of 2009. Property repossession represented the main protection concern in the areas of return. Bureaucratic obstacles and the lack of firm political engagement at various levels slowed, and in some cases even blocked, the process of restitution of land to returnees. In some return sites tensions grew between returnees and resident populations over land property. UNHCR and its implementing partner monitored the situation in the most critical areas of return and advocated for a prompt resolution of property disputes.

In 2009, UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of 43 refugees, including 22 Sierra Leoneans whose refugee status ceased at the beginning of the year. National legislation allows for the integration of refugees, however, local integration opportunities in Mauritania are limited by the fragile socio-economic environment. UNHCR submitted 13 persons for resettlement.

● *Activities and assistance*

Community services: All returnee sites are managed by committees which include returnees and host community members, men and women. In addition, thirty "solidarity funds" helped set up 20 gas shops and 17 butcher shops. Some 31 per cent of adult returnees are involved in income-generating activities financed by UNHCR.

Crop production: Fifteen new gardening projects were created, benefiting some 1300 families.

Domestic needs and household support: In 2009 all returnees were provided with blankets, sanitary kits, hygienic kits for women and girls, mosquito nets, bars of soap, plastic mats, 20-litre jerrycans, plastic buckets, plastic cups, gas cooking sets, ladles, colanders, flat hollow and cooking pots.

Education: By the end of 2009, only 49 per cent of returnee children were enrolled in primary school, and only 2 per cent in secondary school. Some 1,800 school-age children (400 in

Trarza and 1,400 in Brakna) benefited from special classes in Arabic and French. Ten returnee candidates were selected for DAFI scholarships and were able to pursue their university studies. More than 80 returnee teenagers and young adults who were not attending school benefited from vocational training. Thirty-seven returnee sites in the Brakna region received literacy handbooks in the local Pulaar dialect.

Food: All returnees (some 12,000 people) were provided with hot meals and drinks upon arrival at the reception centre and received WFP food rations.

Health and nutrition: Almost 10,000 returnees (52 per cent) living in the Brakna and the Trarza regions received health assistance from UNHCR's public health partner. All returnees received WFP rations to ensure the standard nutritional value.

Legal assistance: UNHCR provided legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers through a partner. The legal aid covered issues such as detention; arrest; civil status (birth, marriage and death certificates); national registration procedures. Should a case go to court, it is closely followed to ensure that the rights of the person of concern to UNHCR are respected.

Operational support (to agencies): UNHCR provided support to all implementing partners participating in repatriation and the reintegration activities.

Sanitation: All returnees had access to adequate sanitation facilities during the return movements. UNHCR provided more than 60 per cent of eligible families with construction kits, but only 5 per cent of these families finalized the construction of family latrines.

Shelter and infrastructure: All returnee families received lightweight tents upon arrival in returnee sites. By the end of 2009, over three-quarters of the 3,860 eligible families had received a shelter construction kit.

Transport and logistics: All returnees were transported across the Senegal River to the transit centre and to returnee sites in Mauritania.

Water: All returnees had access to potable water during the return process. All returnees had access to 20 litres of water per person per day.

● *Constraints*

In 2008, UNHCR's implementing partner did not have the capacity to carry out all the activities planned for the return and reintegration of Mauritanian refugees. UNHCR slowed delivery of identity cards. Emerging land conflicts prompted UNHCR to expand its advocacy for the activation of regional Land Commissions. Land conflicts hindered some reintegration projects and slowed distribution of land permits and shelter construction kits.

Financial information

The supplementary budget for the repatriation of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali has more than doubled since 2007. A generous donor response ensured that many planned activities could be implemented in 2009.

Organization and implementation

UNHCR's operations in Mauritania were managed by the country office in Nouakchott, and field offices in Rosso and Boghé. The field office in Kaedi was transferred to Boghé in May 2009, and the field office in Rosso closed on 31 December 2009. UNHCR's operations were run by six international staff, 13 national employees and 16 UNVs.

Working with others

UNHCR maintained regular working relations with a number of humanitarian and development actors, including UN agencies, implementing partners or Government counterparts. The Office reinforced coordination with various stakeholder at the field level. This contributed to ensuring better complementary and joint interventions.

Overall assessment

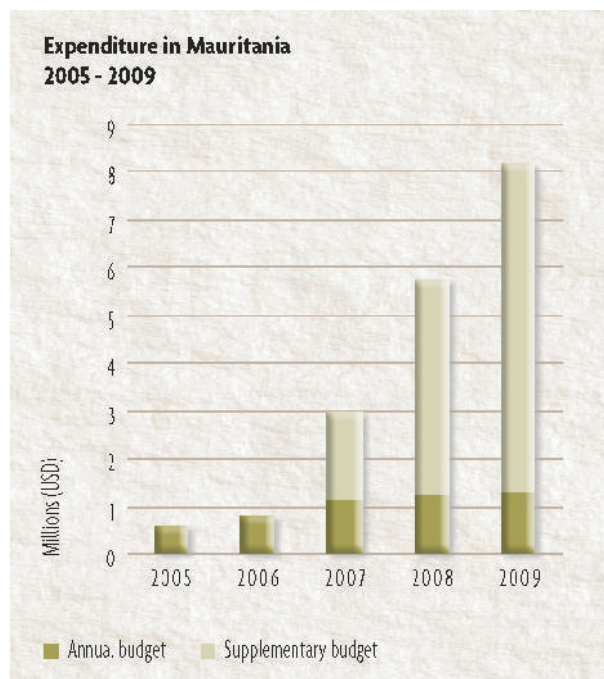
The maintenance of continual and timely communication and exchange of information among partners, UNHCR offices and other actors was essential.

Another major lesson learned was the importance of having a well-planned and fully operational logistics component in place prior to the start of any real repatriation movements. This was especially important given the particularly difficult climatic and distance-related working conditions in Mauritania; the absence of available mechanics and spare parts; and the widespread dispersion of the returnee sites.

The 2009 objective for the organized repatriation of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal has been 80 per cent (19,000) fulfilled, as compared to the initial planning figure of 24,000. Due to the labour and logistics-intensive nature of

the organized return operation, as well as the human and financial resource constraints, a number of reintegration activities destined for returnees could not be fully implemented in 2009.

Partners	
Implementing partners	
International:	Intersos, GTZ, GRET
National:	<i>Santé Sans Frontières (SSF), Association Mauritanienne des Droits de l'Homme (AMDH), ONG ACTION, Nedwa</i>
Operational partners	
UN agencies:	WFP, UNICEF, FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO/UNAIDS
International NGOs:	World Vision (WV), Lutheran World Federation (LWF)
Civil society:	<i>Forum national des ONG de Droits de l'Homme (FONADH)</i>
Government/Agencies:	<i>Ministère de l'intérieur et de la décentralisation (MIDEC), Comité Inter ministériel, Agence nationale d'appui et d'insertion des réfugiés (ANAIR), Commissariat à la sécurité alimentaire (CSA)</i>



Budget, income and expenditure in Mauritania (USD)

	Final budget	Income from contributions	Other funds available	Total funds available	Total expenditure
Annual budget	1,448,269	131,931	1,171,536	1,303,467	1,281,206
Repatriation of Mauritanian refugees from Senegal and Mali to Mauritania SB	7,683,387	5,977,626	1,048,866	7,026,492	6,900,484
Total	9,131,656	6,109,556	2,220,402	8,329,959	8,181,690

Note: Supplementary programmes do not include seven per cent support costs that are recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR. Income from contributions includes contributions earmarked at the country level. Other funds available include transfers from unearmarked and broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

Financial report for UNHCR's operations in Mauritania (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current years' project			Previous years' project
	Annual budget	Supplementary budgets	Total	Annual and supplementary budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	230,253	871,246	1,101,499	0
Community services	27,254	91,218	118,472	9,346
Crop production	0	13,410	13,410	0
Domestic needs and household support	8,773	474,845	483,618	12,384
Education	12,158	12,795	24,952	3,917
Food	17,911	35,384	53,296	10,338
Health and nutrition	22,860	15,908	38,768	2,648
Legal assistance	225,224	601,540	826,764	185,355
Operational support (to agencies)	28,812	554,955	583,767	3,098
Sanitation	0	310,691	310,691	0
Shelter and infrastructure	25,133	1,854,880	1,880,014	20,074
Transport and logistics	23,818	906,452	930,270	15,597
Water	0	37,842	37,842	6,709
Instalments to implementing partners	182,233	1,097,648	1,279,881	(269,466)
Subtotal operational activities	804,429	6,878,815	7,683,245	0
Programme support	476,776	21,668	498,445	0
Total expenditure	1,281,206	6,900,484	8,181,690	0

Cancellation on previous years' expenditure

(69,359)

Instalments with implementing partners

Payments made	477,407	2,812,679	3,290,086	
Reporting received	(295,174)	(1,715,031)	(2,010,205)	
Balance	182,233	1,097,648	1,279,881	

Previous year's report

Instalments with implementing partners:				
Outstanding 1st January				466,629
Reporting received				(269,466)
Refunded to UNHCR				(98,007)
Currency adjustment				0
Outstanding 31st December				99,156