

Update on the ProNexus project in Mauritania

In the framework of the SUN Global Programme, GIZ and UNHCR in Mauritania have designed and are implementing jointly a project that builds capacity for the socio-economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in a manner that benefits and sustains Mauritanian host communities.

Context

Mauritania has maintained a commendable open-door policy towards refugees for decades and is host to the largest number of Malian refugees in the Sahel region. As of **April 2023**, [108 346 refugees](#) are registered with [7 085 living in Nema](#) and areas, [85 088 living in and out the Mbera](#) refugee camp and [16 173 refugees and asylum-seekers in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou](#), mostly from Mali and to a lesser extent from Central African Republic, Syria and other countries in West Africa.

The Central Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) is facing a severe humanitarian and protection crisis, pushing millions of people to flee their homes. The Government of Mauritania has committed itself to a policy of inclusion for refugees, allowing them to be gradually integrated into national services, starting with healthcare and social protection. Since 2021, UNHCR and GIZ have, in support of the Government of Mauritania, designed joint initiatives that facilitate the socio-economic inclusion of refugees, asylum-seekers and vulnerable Mauritians from host communities.

More information about the ProNexus can be found in previous factsheets [May 2021 edition](#), [September 2021 edition](#), [March 2022 edition](#) and [September 2022 edition](#).

Key developments and achievements

October 2022 – April 2023

Access to basic government services

Education

In view in **raising awareness** on the importance of education and increase school enrolment in Mbera camp 170 focus groups were organized in December and reached more than 3000 people. Discussions gathered parents, students and out-of-school children. **Obstacles** to education and reasons of school dropout such as early marriage, household chores or work resulting from

the precarity of the household, have been identified while stressing the importance of learning.



Awareness campaign on the importance of education at the Mbera Camp, @GIZ, Raki

This resulted in increased interest and investment of the community in education.

Community-based action of this type has been identified by refugees as an important tool to

effectively **enhance school attendance**.

More broadly, building on the ongoing development of the **10-year national education sector development plan** (PNDSE III), the project contributed to the inclusion of refugee in the sector analysis through active participation to workshops since the end of 2022. To support this work, a partnership with UNESCO IIEP to develop a budgeted action plan for refugee inclusion and started in January 2023. It entails several field missions and consultations with refugees and education actors, to identify **priority programmes for inclusion** of all refugees and determine the modalities and cost of inclusion.

Healthcare

To further the process of the refugee's inclusion in the national health system started in 2020, a workshop was held in March 2023 to jointly define with the authorities a **roadmap** and a five-year action plan (2023- 2027) to ensure the durability of the transition from humanitarian to government-led delivery of health services. The roadmap includes specific considerations related to governance and resource & infrastructure mobilizations as well as a detailed indicative budget.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

In partnership with SOS Desert, the project continued to strengthen the peaceful coexistence between the host and

refugee communities through awareness raising on **best practices** sharing related to WASH and joint environmental activities such as community-based diagnosis of environmental needs (mapping of green areas) and **tree planting of 15 ha** in and around Mbera camp.

Access to rights

As part of its decentralization the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, Humanitarian Action and Relations with Civil Society (CDHAHRSC) is supported by the Pronexus in developing a **unified regional antenna model**. This aims at improving proximity to the citizens, while being an opportunity to ensure social cohesion between host and refugee communities in the Hodh Chargui through better understanding of rights and obligations of each communities. Awareness activities will be developed closely with the recently opened UNHCR field unit in **Nema** supporting the inclusion of refugees registered in the Hodh Chargui.

Community engagement and communication with communities

To reinforce social inclusion and strengthening citizen participation and community engagement, a diagnosis of **communication mechanisms** between the communities helped identifying existing tools and their degree of formality and functionality. Gaps were identified such as weak animation of channels or lack of access by some categories of the population. Modalities to improve communication were identified through a participatory process involving key community actors with the aim of creating an environment conducive to information sharing.

Assessing community participation and communication tools, will serve as a basis to improve two-way communications channels, as well as accountability which are key in the context of increased inclusion of refugees into national systems and access to governmental basic services.

Improving access to environmentally sensitive livelihood opportunities

Reinforcing access to livelihood opportunities

As part of its partnership with the National agency for Solidarity and fight Against Poverty (Ta'azour/Al Baraka) and the national employment agency (Techghil) the project fostered a **collaboration** between the two to support the development of small enterprises, in and around Mbera Camp. Awareness campaigns on the funding opportunities were carried by Techghil with the support of UNHCR camp management partner. Projects were selected based on criteria such as the vulnerability level related to the inclusion in the national social registry using Al Baraka methodology. Following the selection process, **120 refugees and 39 Mauritians**

benefitted from dedicated coaching and trainings on business management (Gerer Mieux Votre Entreprise – GERME). Through these partnerships, the project aims at increasing inclusion of refugees in national programs to support their self-reliance.

Enhance the agriculture sector

As part of the 'Agri-preneurship' initiative, in the municipality of Fassala, where agriculture is the main **economic activity**, ProNexus proceeds to the structuring of the farmers by creating a **main committee** representing 24 villages- subcommittees in order to gain more legitimacy in the eyes of governmental bodies and actors. Members were trained on good governance, advocacy, and agribusiness to improve their capacity to define and express their needs and defend their interests. This reinforces promotion and inclusion of vulnerable groups and refugees in the agricultural sector through the prioritization and valorization of agricultural resources and areas that can be supported and strengthened.

Exploring the potential of village saving loans association model in Mauritania

In a context of low employment opportunities, mostly focused on **entrepreneurship and self-employment**, the project supported the assessment of the development of **Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA)** in refugee hosting areas.

Inside and outside Mbera camp, the study on the VSLA model shows the existence of multiple types of savings groups (such as Savings and Internal Lending Communities, SME saving groups etc.) and the use of funds mainly to support new collective income generation activities (IGAs) or individual investments of members of collective IGAs. Based on the findings, a **roadmap** and a **training package** will be designed to support ongoing initiatives and increase the VSLA opportunities for both refugees and locals, considering the socio-cultural specificities.

Improved access to social protection

Promotion of financial inclusion



Delivery of booklets PROCAPEC/Al Baraka; @HCR

In view of reinforcing financial inclusion and fostering social protection mechanisms, the project supported the access of refugees and locals selected to develop IGAs to financial education training delivered and opened accounts at the *Agence de Promotion des Caisses Populaires d'Épargne et de Crédit (PROCAPEC)*. A total of **114 IGAs for refugees** and **15 for locals** were developed and supported, of which 40% are **women-led**.

Comparative study on socio-economic situation of refugees and host communities in the Hodh Chargui

Based on data collected for the roll out of the **national social registry** for host communities and refugees in the department of Bassikounou, a comparative analysis of the socioeconomic situation of those communities was conducted to identify gaps in access to services and inform future interventions.

The main results stress an **inequal access to education** (57% for host communities against 23% for refugees); to **social protection** (vast majority of refugee households benefit from a social protection program against only half of host community); levels of **food security** (85% of host communities have an acceptable food consumption score against 25% of the refugees). Similarly, and related to the camp setting that allows provision of services by humanitarian in a targeted area, **refugees access to health** and WASH services is much better than of host communities. The analysis provides key evidence related to access to services that will support and guide interventions.

Strengthening government - led coordination mechanisms

Commission for the Coordination of Projects Development Affecting Refugees (CCPDR)

In line with Mauritania's commitment to further refugee **inclusion into national systems**, regular meetings are held with the CCPDR. In view of translating these commitments in concrete actions and ensure coherence between ongoing projects a comprehensive operational action plan for the protection of refugees. Under the leadership of the General Director of Territorial Administration, discussions on Mauritania's commitment at the **upcoming Global Refugee Forum** were held. A team responsible for taking stock of the commitments made in 2019 and making new proposals for the 2023 forum was established.

Promotion of interorganizational learning on completed responses at nexus level

Analysis of GIZ-UNHCR cooperation in Mauritania

Mauritania is one of the three country **case studies** selected for the joint study on 'Support to UNHCR in facilitating the operationalization of the Global compact on Refugees in the HDP Nexus'. This study will inform the modalities of collaboration between **humanitarian** and **development** agencies to implement new ways of working and concrete operationalization of the Global Compact on Refugees.

The case study in Mauritania shows how the operationalization of the GCR contributes to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Good practices such as co-location of ProNexus team, identification of complementarity of interventions and relations were identified as well as factors of success for cooperation such as the **country's open-door policy**, support to ongoing development investment and complementary programming. The will and interest of national authorities remain the most important condition for moving from humanitarian aid to long-term and sustainable planning to include refugees into national services.

Cross-cutting activities

In order to improve access to basic services provided in the Camp of Mbera and the 04 communes of the Moughataa of Bassikounou, a **support mission** to the communes was carried out until October 2022 on 03 components. The key element of this municipal capacity building mission is the **provision of basic services** such as water and primary and preschool education.

The activities carried out have contributed to strengthen the administrative management of municipalities, in particular through the implementation of water infrastructure maintenance plans based on the needs identified during institutional diagnoses.

To increase the **quality** of the services provided to the local population, training in municipal project management and archiving has been provided to the administrative managers of the municipalities.

Finally, the creation of Inclusion and Social Cohesion Units (**CISC**) and Citizen Consultation Frameworks (**CCCs**) in each commune has fostered citizen participation, allowing a range of community members, including the most vulnerable (specially youth, women and refugees) to contribute to the process of managing municipal services and local decisions. The members of these structures have also seen their skills strengthened to better understand **their roles and missions**.

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