ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY | Despite continued economic and weather challenges, food security improved in Mauritania.

PEAK 2023 (JUNE–AUGUST)

0.5M people or 13% of the total population faced high levels of acute food insecurity. Of them, 28,000 were in Emergency (CH Phase 4).

This number has almost halved since the peak period of 2022 when the country was still experiencing the effects of the 2021 drought that decimated local food production.

DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS 2023–2024

Economic shocks High prices of food continued to strain the most vulnerable populations, despite annual food inflation declining from a 16 percent peak in March 2023 to 5 percent by December 2023 (WFP Economic Explorer, 2024).

Prices of local staple cereals declined seasonally, with adequate market supplies from the harvest, but still remained high. Overall, prices of rice were 60 percent above the five-year average and wheat 43 percent above by October 2023 (Mauritania CH, November 2023).

Weather extremes In 2023, Mauritania faced dry spells in July and August, impacting pastures and rainy crops and necessitating re-sowing in various areas. Rainfall deficits particularly affected poor households in northern agropastoral and southeastern pastoral zones. While rice production increased in 2023, production of rainfed sorghum, millet and maize declined. However, the aggregate cereal output was still slightly above the five-year average.

Conflict/insecurity By the end of 2023, UNHCR estimates that Mauritania hosted approximately 118,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, predominantly from Mali, fleeing escalating conflicts. Residing mainly in the M’béra Camp, more than half of them lack regular work, with a small fraction engaged in daily labour or trade. The majority rely on activities such as livestock rearing, domestic work or handicrafts, and are heavily dependent on humanitarian food aid to meet their consumption needs (FEWS NET, November 2023).

ACUTE MALNUTRITION

0.2M children under 5 years old with acute malnutrition, 2023

Source: WCAHO Database, December 2023.

High temperatures and uneven rainfall adversely affected pastures in the north and southeast, prompting early internal transhumance and reliance on animal feed. This situation was exacerbated by over 80 bushfires reported by 30 September, 2023 (FEWS NET, November 2023).

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Inadequate practices At the national level, 60 percent of children under 6 months benefited from exclusive breastfeeding (SMART, 2021), while only 22 percent of children aged 6–23 months received a Minimum Acceptable Diet.

Inadequate services The increased influx of refugees fleeing insecurity in Mali, as well as returning Mauritians, put additional pressure on scarce resources, including basic services such as health, nutrition, water and sanitation (UNICEF, 2023).

In Guidimaka, which has the lowest rate of tap water use at 50 percent, 35 percent of residents use water from unprotected wells as their main source of drinking water, which increases the risk of waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea (SMART 2021).