



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



# MAURITANIA

## COUNTRY PROFILE

The Islamic Republic of Mauritania is a vast, ethnically diverse, and arid country with an expansive coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. Mauritania bridges the Arab Maghreb and Western sub-Saharan Africa. While it produces oil, gold, iron, and has significant gas stocks, it remains a nation that faces multiple development and social challenges, affecting women and youth the most. With droughts becoming more frequent and severe, food prices are rising, pushing or keeping large segments of the population in poverty.

As a country that imports approximately 70% of its food, Mauritanian's food security is particularly vulnerable to global economic shocks, such as price increases and supply chain disruptions. This situation is exacerbated by farmers relying on rainfed agriculture while droughts are happening more often. The fractured educational system contributes to low school retention and high youth unemployment rates. The continued residence of refugees in the M'bera camps, in such a fragile ecosystem, is straining peaceful cohabitation with host communities.

### OUR WORK

#### HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

According to UNHCR, as of January 2023, Mauritania was hosting nearly 110,000 Malian refugees. This is more than twice the number recorded two years ago. The majority reside in the Southeast, a food-insecure region where already struggling host communities must share their scarce resources. USAID's humanitarian assistance supports the provision of an integrated assistance package to refugees, including food assistance, school meals, and specialized nutritious food to children and pregnant and lactating women and girls for malnutrition treatment. It also supports initiatives to improve vulnerable households' food security, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions.

## **DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS & GOVERNANCE**

USAID partners with Mauritania to offer youth social and economic growth opportunities as a way to prevent violent extremism. USAID also works with West African regional bodies, national governments, and civil society organizations to counter violent extremism in the Sahel. In Mauritania, USAID develops programs to promote social cohesion, reduce conflict, and limit the reach of violent extremism amongst at-risk communities.

At the beginning of 2023, USAID launched an 18-month initiative with a budget of \$1.8 million to support elections and a peaceful transfer of power. The program will build on the first peaceful power transfer between two democratically elected leaders in Mauritania's history, which happened in 2019.

In 2023, USAID also started a one-year, \$500,000 activity to promote the transparent and equitable management of mining and other extractive industries. The activity will help civil society organizations and communities promote measures that fully meet the standards of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, such as using some of the revenues to protect the environment and foster economic growth.

USAID is working with communities, local leaders, and young women affected by and vulnerable to early or forced marriage to enact social behavior change within families and prevent this complex and devastating practice. Activities include raising awareness, group discussions, and creating income-generating activities.

## **EDUCATION AND YOUTH**

While the law mandates that children attend school for a minimum of six years, high poverty levels often result in many children, especially girls, dropping out of school before completing this requirement. Children from certain castes often receive no formal education. As young Mauritians struggle to access education and employment opportunities, they often feel isolated from society and unable to improve their situation. As of 2022, youth unemployment stands at 40%. Through two activities with a combined budget of \$24 million, USAID provides work, civic, social, and life skills to vulnerable youth to help them find more and better socioeconomic opportunities.

## **GLOBAL HEALTH**

USAID supports efforts to expand Mauritanian's demand for, access to, and use of family planning services. In addition, USAID works with the government of Mauritania to strengthen health systems in COVID-19 prevention programs in reproductive health, HIV, and maternal & child health.

## **CONTACTS**

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