



## North Africa

### Recent developments

In early 2004, the Government of Morocco, the POLISARIO, and the Government of Algeria (as the asylum country for Saharan refugees) agreed to the launch of a joint UNHCR/MINURSO programme of family exchange visits between Saharan refugees in camps in Algeria and their communities of origin in Western Sahara. More than 1,200 persons took part in the pilot phase of this project, which lasted from March until August 2004. Meanwhile, more than 9,200 telephone calls have been made between refugees in Tindouf and their families in Western Sahara through the telephone service set up as part of a planned series of confidence-building measures. It is expected that this project will resume in late 2004 and continue through 2005.

In July 2004, Mauritania adopted a national refugee law, paving the way for the establishment of a national framework for the protection of refugees and returnees in Mauritania.

In the course of 2004, UNHCR initiated a dialogue with North African States and the European Union on how to deal with the growing, multifaceted problem of people, originating mostly from

Algeria

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Mauritania

Morocco

Tunisia

Western Sahara



sub-Saharan African countries, seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, often losing their lives in the attempt. UNHCR is advocating comprehensive strategies to address these problems. These strategies aim to protect those in need of international protection while addressing the legitimate concerns of Governments responsible for the management of their borders.

Whenever feasible, long-term solutions will be offered to refugees in the region in the form of voluntary repatriation and local integration. UNHCR also foresees the resettlement of people who qualify on protection grounds, based on a spirit of responsibility sharing.

## Strategic objectives

Through 2005, UNHCR will continue to promote the adoption of national refugee legislation and administrative structures which ensure that refugees and asylum-seekers are attended to promptly. The management of the migration/asylum nexus will be a key priority in the Office's strategic plan in 2005 for the region. In this context, UNHCR will have to identify and adopt special measures in northern African countries in order to ensure that asylum-seekers and refugees are not subject to *refoulement* or expelled to other countries and that their claims can be processed according to international refugee standards.

As part of its government capacity-building programme, UNHCR will continue to conduct seminars for government officials as well as NGOs dealing with asylum and migration issues.

## Operations

UNHCR in **Algeria** will continue to provide protection and assistance services to some 165,000 Western Saharan refugees (estimated figure provided by the Government of Algeria) who have been accommodated in the refugee camps - Awserd, Dakhla, Laayoune, Smara and 27 February School - in the Tindouf Governorate (Wilaya) in south-western Algeria since 1975. A multi-sectoral assistance programme including food, transport/logistics, domestic needs/household support, water supply (non-agricultural), sanitation, health/nutrition, shelter and community services will continue to be implemented in 2005 for refugees in all camps. UNHCR will also make a special investment in strengthening support capacity for vulnerable refugees. Finally, an adequate level of preparedness will be maintained in case voluntary repatriation becomes possible.

UNHCR will also assist a small number (40) of urban refugees - mostly from Cameroon, Iraq, Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia and Syria. There are also

4,000 Palestinian refugees in Algeria, but they are well integrated into the country and receive no UNHCR assistance. UNHCR will promote the granting of refugee status to eligible applicants, and seek durable solutions for the urban refugees while providing medical and financial assistance to vulnerable cases. Voluntary repatriation will be promoted and facilitated for urban refugees whenever feasible. Resettlement will become an option when all other possibilities are exhausted.

The Office in **Mauritania** will build on the momentum created by the adoption of the new refugee law, and enhance training and capacity building of government authorities on international and refugee law. It will continue to provide selected assistance to some 475 urban refugees, the majority of whom have arrived from Sierra Leone and Liberia, along with a few refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Côte d'Ivoire. Voluntary repatriation will be promoted and facilitated for the urban caseload. Resettlement will be initiated when no other solutions have been found. Mauritania also hosts 26,500 Western Saharan refugees, who do not receive UNHCR assistance, but who are expected to take part in any future voluntary repatriation movement.

UNHCR in **Morocco** will assist some 350 refugees and asylum-seekers – mostly from Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and the DRC. In addition, occasional support will be brought to some 130 Palestinian refugees. The most vulnerable amongst the refugees and asylum-seekers will benefit from a subsistence allowance along with special measures (where necessary) to ensure access to health and education services.

The proximity of Morocco to Europe has made the country an attractive transit zone for economic migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. UNHCR is currently the sole agency in the country entitled to grant refugee status and verify asylum claims. UNHCR expects an increased need in 2005 for support to the authorities in ensuring proper treatment for immigrants who are in need of international protection.

UNHCR in **Tunisia** will continue to assist roughly 100 urban refugees and asylum-seekers originating mainly from Algeria, Iraq and Burundi.



Their first needs are protection against *refoulement* and basic assistance while seeking durable solutions. At the government level, UNHCR seeks to expand the role and responsibilities of the authorities in the refugee status determination process and to facilitate the issuance and renewal of residence permits to refugees. UNHCR's ultimate objectives are the enactment of a refugee law and the establishment of an eligibility body. The Office is equally engaged in promoting and disseminating refugee law within government bodies and various elements of civil society.

As of 31 December 2004, nearly 12,000 urban refugees will have registered with the UNHCR Office in Tripoli, **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya** (Libya). The vast majority (74 per cent) of the refugees are Palestinians, followed by Somalis, Sierra Leoneans, Iraqis and a few individuals from other African and Arab countries.



Algeria: Saharan refugees going for a UNHCR-sponsored home visit, part of the larger confidence-building measures, which allows refugees living in exile for almost 30 years a five day visit with family members in Western Sahara, and vice versa on air transport provided by MINURSO. *UNHCR / S.Hopper*

The UNHCR office in Tripoli sought in 2004 to encourage the Government to sign the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, without immediate results. The Government has not developed a specific administrative structure to deal with refugees and asylum-seekers or national legislation to determine refugee status. Nevertheless, Libya did sign and ratify the OAU Convention of 1969. The Libyan Government considers refugees and asylum-seekers to be foreigners residing in Libya without any specific distinction. Consequently UNHCR is currently the major provider, monitor and coordinator of protection and assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers.

In addition to maintaining care and maintenance services for needy refugees, in 2005 UNHCR will focus again on establishing a legal framework with the Libyan Government for the protection and assistance of refugees and asylum-seekers.

The motives of asylum-seekers and migrants heading for Libya and beyond are explained by the lasting conflicts in their countries of origin and the host country's proximity to Europe. Within the broader context of migration management, the Office will work towards developing partnerships with the local authorities and other key actors and building local capacities aimed at safeguarding the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Algeria	4,533,766
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1,021,267
Mauritania	367,535
Morocco	275,603
Tunisia	201,431
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,399,602</b>