

North Africa

Major developments

Throughout 2003, UNHCR worked closely to support UN efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Western Sahara.

In Morocco, a bomb attack targeted Jewish and European centres in Casablanca in early summer, killing 45 people, increasing a general fear of terrorist attacks in the subregion.

In September, the UN Security Council lifted sanctions imposed on the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (Libya), following Libya's agreement to pay compensation to the families of the victims of bombed aircrafts.

Challenges and concerns

UNHCR's concerns in the region continued to be dominated by the situation of the estimated 165,000 refugees from Western Sahara who have been living in camps in south-western Algeria for more than 25 years. A political solution to the conflict in Western Sahara thus remained the fundamental prerequisite for durable solutions for the refugees living in camps. For most of the year, efforts

Algeria

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

Mauritania

Morocco

Tunisia

Western Sahara Territory

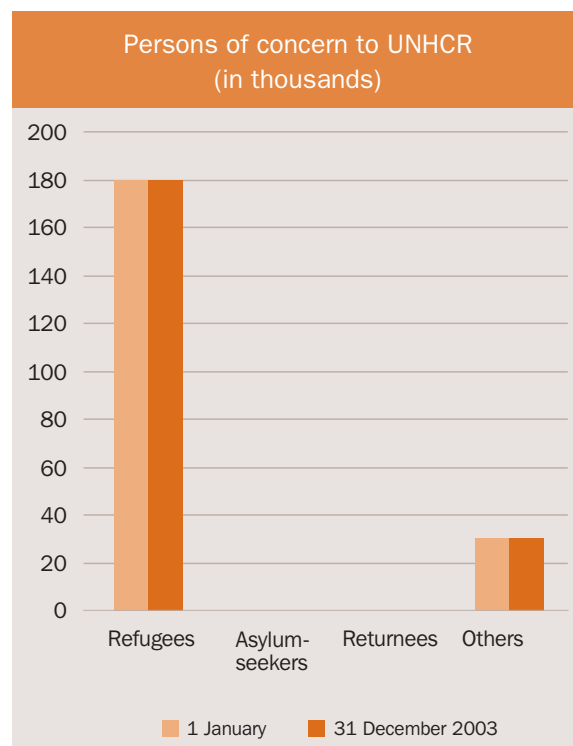


were frustrated by the persistent political stalemate between the parties concerned and insufficient funding. However, in December 2003, there was a breakthrough, allowing for a number of confidence-building steps to begin.

All five countries in North Africa have signed the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, but only Libya has not acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol. Nonetheless, the legal framework for refugee protection is weak throughout the region. It has not always been easy to formalize working arrangements with the authorities concerned: in Libya, for example, where UNHCR has been present for 12 years, no formal legal framework has been established with the Government. Although Tunisia is a signatory to all three international refugee instruments, it does not have any RSD procedures, refugee legislation, nor a formal legal framework in place to address refugee issues.

Consequently, in 2003, UNHCR continued to work on building the capacity of countries in the subregion to deal with refugee issues - taking into consideration the specific socio-economic conditions and financial constraints to which the Office's work is subject. Efforts focused on enhancing

self-sufficiency and on helping to find solutions for refugees in the region.



Progress towards solutions

In close collaboration with MINURSO and the Office of the SRSG, as well as with the host Government, ECHO, WFP, national and international NGOs, UNHCR continued to provide assistance to Western Saharan refugees in the five Tindouf camps. Towards the end of the year, progress was finally made on the implementation of UN confidence-building measures, including the setting up of telephone links and the provision of opportunities for separated families to meet. A series of projects was also put in place to improve the capacity of refugees, particularly women, to rebuild their lives once they are able to return to their homeland.

The Office continued to promote voluntary repatriation from Libya whenever feasible, in particular for Somali and Sierra Leonean refugees. However, only one refugee repatriated during the year. Two Iraqi refugees were resettled to a third country. Meanwhile, insecurity in countries such as Somalia and Liberia led to an increase in the number of asylum-seekers entering Libya.

Progress was made in Mauritania, where new refugee legislation is expected to be adopted in early 2004. UNHCR has been working with the authorities to enhance their capacity to implement the legislation as soon as it comes into force. Following a seminar on human rights and refugee protection held in Mauritania in June 2003, a think tank was set up in the Ministry of Interior to establish modalities for the application of international instruments relating to refugees.

Operations

In **Algeria**, UNHCR strengthened protection activities in the Tindouf camps, stepping up monitoring, improving contacts with refugees, and enhancing the administration of justice in the camps. In early December 2003, in on going efforts to strengthen the relationship between the Saharan refugee population and their communities of origin, UNHCR established a free telephone link in the camps in Algeria to Western Sahara. This was designed to support person-to-person contact among the separated Sahrawi communities - as part of the United Nations Confidence-Building Measures designed to support the political process.



Algeria: Sahrawi refugees in Laayoune camp, Tindouf Region.
UNHCR/A. Hollmann

UNHCR also funded a bleach production unit for water treatment and constructed a system to pipe water from wells in Al-Ayoune to Aswerd camp. Water was previously transported from Al-Ayoune by truck.

UNHCR continued to provide protection and assistance to 30 urban refugees of different nationalities and to seek durable solutions for them. The Office promoted international refugee law and facilitated the establishment of an effective asylum framework



that had been created for Somali refugees in 2002, thus tripling its population. By the end of 2003, however, the population had dropped to under 200. Over the year, UNHCR rehabilitated the compound by upgrading the building as well as the water, sanitation, electricity and security systems.

In **Mauritania**, over the year, there was an increase in the number of asylum-seekers arriving from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Of these, 87 were recognised as refugees, bringing the number of urban refugees to 475. At the same time, 16 Sierra Leoneans repatriated voluntarily. The situation of the 26,400 Sahrawis who remain in the north of the country pending a political solution in their country remained unchanged, with UNHCR carrying out regular missions to monitor their living conditions.

In **Morocco**, UNHCR provided basic assistance to 500 refugees, most of them from Palestine, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sub-Saharan African countries.

In **Tunisia**, efforts were made to expedite some long-standing RSD cases. The Office advocated for the establishment of national RSD processes and for refugees to be granted residence permits. Some 100 (mostly Algerian) refugees in Tunisia live in urban areas – 60 received financial assistance from UNHCR in 2003. One family was resettled.

Funding

During 2003, UNHCR prioritised its activities within the allocated programme budget. Thus, the basic material assistance provided to refugees was reduced during the year.

for the provision of international protection and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees in Algeria.

In the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya**, UNHCR strengthened relationships with local NGOs and civil society, signing new agreements with three more partners during the year. Assistance programmes focused on fostering self-reliance via micro-credit projects, helping to find jobs for refugees and funding job-oriented training. In July and August, 800 people (mostly Somalis) suddenly moved into a compound

Voluntary contributions - Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget	
		Income	Contribution
Algeria			
	<i>España con ACNUR (SPA)</i>	8,641	3,729
	Germany	554,821	554,821
	Japan	400,000	400,000
	Norway	291,121	291,121
	Private donors Italy	6,208	66,208
	Spain	279,190	274,286
	United States of America	700,000	700,000
North Africa			
	Sweden	342,075	342,075
	United States of America	3,125,000	3,125,000
Western Sahara			
	UK for UNHCR (GBR)	268	268
Total		5,707,324	5,757,508

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)

Country	Revised budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Algeria	4,717,579	4,603,645
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	1,034,140	859,087
Mauritania	352,185	344,488
Morocco	272,694	236,856
Tunisia	180,925	175,985
Western Sahara Territory	324,256	257,447
Total	6,881,779	6,477,508