

TUNISIA

16 July 2020

Rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia: important steps forward socio-economic inclusion.

Tunisia is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as to the 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa; but it has yet to adopt a national legislation on asylum. Tunisian authorities have nevertheless made significant efforts to give refugees and asylum seekers access to certain rights and services, that have recently been reinforced with the adoption of new measures to reinforce their socio-economic inclusion.

Access to work and vocational training: a new reference document

UNHCR Tunisia and its partner the Arab Institute of Human Rights (AIHR), together with the Tunisian Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training launched an action plan to expand employment opportunities for refugees. Two workshops for the representatives of the Ministry were held in March and July 2020. The main outcome of the workshops is a reference document on “Refugee access to work and vocational training”. The document collects standard procedures (technical and legal) and best practices for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in vocational training and employment opportunities, to be used by Ministry staff members. The document’s main gains include:

- The use of electronic stamp approval for employment contracts of refugees and asylum-seekers;
- The annulation of the priority clause that gives an advantage to nationals over foreigners;
- The exemption for Syrians refugees from the obligation to submit a certificate of professional competence in order to obtain employment; the certificate is replaced by a self-certification;
- Refugees under the age of 18 can systematically benefit from vocational training and adult refugees can benefit from continuous training;
- Refugees with a valid passport are not required to present a residence permit to obtain the certificate of professional competence;
- Refugees with a valid passport are not required to present a residence permit for the signature of the work permits by the Immigration and Foreign Labour Office.

Access to national social security system (*Casse Nationale de Sécurité Sociale - CNSS*)

Until 2019, even with regular employment, refugees could not access national social security. Following a decision by the Ministry of Social Affairs in May 2019, refugees in Tunisia registered with UNHCR, who hold regular employment with a contract validated by the Ministry of Vocational Training and Employment or who are self-employed, are able to enrol in the Tunisian social security system, thereby formalizing their employment. In June 2020, a Sudanese refugee from Sfax, employed in the agricultural sector, was the first refugee in Tunisia to access the Tunisian Social Security institution, the *Casse Nationale pour la Sécurité Sociale* (CNSS). This enrolment allowed him to access social services such as health insurance and retirement funds.



Ahmed Bakhite is the first refugee in Tunisia to access the CNSS © UNHCR/Peter Horton

The president of the Republic granted citizenship to 135 people, including 34 Palestinians.

Naturalization of refugees and migrants is a key measure for local inclusion. Citizenship provides equal rights and is the entry door to a country’s civic, political, and economic life. Therefore, UNHCR welcomes the decision by Tunisian President Kais Saïed to grant citizenship to 135 people, including one Syrian refugee and 34 Palestinians, for having lived in Tunisia for decades.