

Tunisia

September 2020

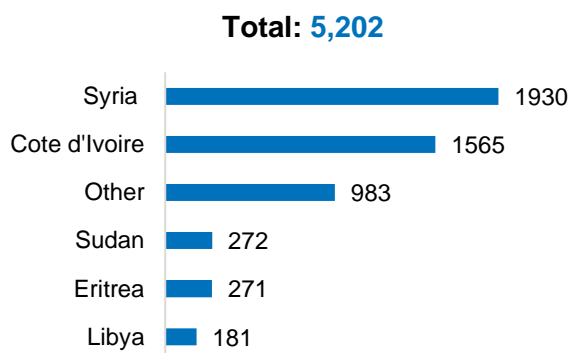
Refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia **originate mainly from the Middle East, sub-Saharan and the horn of Africa**. Most reach Tunisia by land or air from neighbouring countries, and **within mixed migration movements**, by sea or land to/from Libya.

Tunisia has yet to adopt **a national asylum system**. UNHCR is the sole entity responsible for conducting registration and Refugee Status Determination (RSD). The unstable political and socio-economic situation provides **limited durable solutions** for most refugees and asylum seekers.

The **deteriorating security and political situation of neighbouring countries, including Libya**, has the potential to trigger a significant influx of persons in need of international protection and assistance.

POPULATION OF CONCERN

by country of origin

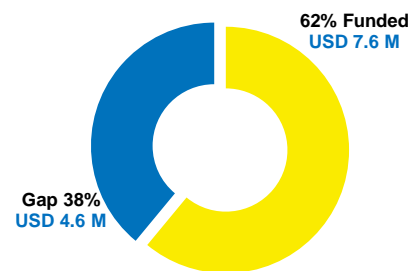


As of 31 August 2020

FUNDING (AS OF 29 SEPTEMBER 2020)

USD 12.3 M

requested for the Tunisia operation



COVID – 19 IN TUNISIA

Strict measures to slow the spread of the virus were introduced relatively early in Tunisia compared to other countries in the region, resulting in a small number of cases (around 1,000) from March until June. After the reopening of international borders on 27 June, a rise in cases was recorded with a new wave of local contaminations bringing the number of cases up to over 15,000 in September. Tunisian government announced new preventive measures that entered into force on 26th August, such as the obligation to wear a mask in all public places and to present a negative PCR test to enter the country from abroad.

A verification exercise conducted by UNHCR at the end of April 2020 evidenced the deep and hard-hitting economic impact of the COVID crisis on persons of concern in Tunisia, as 70% declared not being able to pay for rent, food, medicines and utilities. Cash assistance was therefore expanded to reach a larger number of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. Hygiene kits were distributed, as well as government and civil society food packages to refugee families. People reaching Tunisia within mixed population movements are systematically placed into 14-days quarantine and tested. Communication with communities was expanded across Tunisia, with five new hotlines established and social media platforms enhanced for two-way communication with persons of concern. Preventive health measures were put in place in UNHCR-managed shelters. UNHCR supported the Government by donating Refugee Housing Units for visitor screening in hospitals and isolation of cases.

Working with Partners

Together with the Tunisian Government, **UNHCR ensures international protection and delivery of multi-sectorial assistance to persons of concern**. UNHCR works with the Ministries of Justice, Education, Health, Affairs, Women, Family, Childhood and the Elderly, and Vocational Training and Employment to enable refugees and asylum seekers to enjoy essential rights and basic services, and to ensure their inclusion in social and economic programmes. Moreover, **UNHCR maintains positive collaboration with state entities at the local level**—namely in southern Tunisia—where the highest number of refugees and asylum seekers are hosted.

UNHCR collaborates closely with the UN Resident Coordinator and other UN Agencies, including IOM, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and humanitarian actors for a coordinated and effective response.

The following partners implement specific sectors of activities:

- **Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR)** – capacity-building and advocacy on international protection and asylum issues, including in the context of mixed populations movements and legal assistance.
- **Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability (TAMSS)** – livelihoods and self-reliance activities, support or accessing employment, including vocational training, micro-business and wage employment.
- **Tunisian Refugees Council (CTR)** – profiling of new arrivals; reception and shelter management; multi-sector assistance (food vouchers and non-food items, cash assistance); support to healthcare and education; individual case management and community based protection; protection and prevention against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); child protection; psychosocial support; assistance to persons with specific needs; counselling and recreational activities in the context of mixed population flows.

UNHCR is a member of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Tunisia and contributes to the planning of the next five-year Cooperation Framework that will constitute the foundation of the UN's collaboration with the Tunisian Government during the period 2021 - 2025.

Operational context

UNHCR established its presence in Tunisia in 1963, and in 2011 signed an agreement with the Government to address the large number of refugees and asylum seekers coming from Libya. **Since the end of 2018 and throughout 2019, UNHCR Tunisia witnessed a growing number of new arrivals from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan**. In parallel, a growing number of Ivorian nationals who entered Tunisia by plane and in were possession of three-month tourist visa approached UNHCR to seek international protection, resulting in a five-fold increase of registered refugees and asylum seekers by 2020. At the same time, Tunisia hosts refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflicts across the Middle East, primarily from Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Palestine.

In the aftermath of Libya's 2011's revolution, **the push for a more inclusive and equitable society emerged in Tunisia**, primarily as a way to resolve current political and economic challenges. This need is at the core of the Government's Development Plan 2016 – 2020, and among the priorities for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

UNHCR activities are aligned with these objectives, aiming to establish a national protection system able to guarantee human rights and to achieve social-economic inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers.

Main Activities

Protection

- In the absence of a formal national asylum system, UNHCR carries out **registration of refugees and asylum-seekers** and **Refugee Status Determination (RSD)**, to ensure that persons of concern to UNHCR are identified and documented. This helps to prevent arbitrary arrest, detention and *refoulement*. In 2017, UNHCR introduced biometric enrolment to improve the quality of data collected and to avoid fraud.
- UNHCR conducts **extensive capacity-building programs** with members of parliament, state agents, civil society, journalists, lawyers and judges **on the principles of international protection and refugee rights**, in order to create a *de facto* protection space for persons of concern to UNHCR present in the country.
- UNHCR trains border officials on awareness of **asylum and protection issues in the context of mixed population movements**. Tunisian coast guards frequently rescue boats in distress off the Tunisian coast, including many departing from Libya. Groups of migrants and refugees attempting irregular crossings over the Tunisia-Libya land border are also frequently intercepted. UNHCR seeks to ensure that border management takes into consideration the protection needs of refugees and asylum-seekers.
- UNHCR uses a participatory approach to enhance **community-based protection**, building links between different service providers and increasing engagement with refugee communities. UNHCR's partner, the Tunisian Refugees Council (CTR), works to develop safe spaces and promote communication with affected communities, in order to better identify and refer people with specific needs or at heightened protection risk (i.e. survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and unaccompanied or separated minors).
- UNHCR's partner AIHR provides **legal counselling and legal representation** to support refugees and asylum seekers.

Education

- Children who are refugees or asylum-seekers have **access to primary and secondary education**. To increase school attendance, UNHCR and partners provide a one-time education grant for students to help parents purchase books and school supplies.

Health

- Refugees and asylum-seekers have **access to basic public health facilities**. UNHCR and its partner CTR support vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees with the reimbursement of medical expenses and medicines for basic primary healthcare, chronic diseases, and emergency medical interventions.

Food Security and Nutrition

- Refugees and asylum seekers hosted in shelters, as well as vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers living in urban and rural areas, receive **cash assistance to purchase food and other essential items**.

Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFIs)

- Vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers have **access to temporary accommodation in shelters** while their refugee status determination procedure is processed.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

- With its partner TAMMS, UNHCR is **enhancing refugees' self-reliance and livelihood opportunities** by supporting access to tailored vocational training, micro-businesses and employment with private companies.

Emergency preparedness

- With the deteriorating security situation in neighboring Libya since mid-2019, the Government of Tunisia, UNHCR and IOM—in close collaboration with other UN Agencies—accelerated **contingency planning efforts**. However no substantive influx from Libya was recorded during 2020 due to the closure of the land border during COVID-19 containment measures. UNHCR is currently working to reinforce the capacity of the Government of Tunisia at the border entry points.

Key priorities for 2020

- Support the **adoption of the draft national asylum law**, while continuing capacity building to foster good practices in the interim.
- Continue **profiling, registration and refugee status determination** to identify persons in need of international protection in the context of mixed population flows.
- **Promote refugees' self-reliance** by supporting **access to livelihoods** and basic services, as well as prioritizing direct assistance to the most vulnerable.

Key challenges for 2020

- Comprehensive domestic legislation to establish a **national protection framework** for refugees and asylum-seekers is pending adoption, leaving refugees and asylum seekers in a fragile legal and socio-economic situation.
- Tunisia remains affected by the **volatile political and security environment in the region**, namely in neighbouring Libya. Increasing new arrivals are severely compromising the limited absorption capacity within the country.
- **Shelter capacity** to accommodate new arrivals remains a challenge. The number of asylum seekers awaiting refugee status determination continues to grow, despite enhanced staff capacity.

External / Donors Relations

Special thanks to earmarked donors for UNHCR operations in Tunisia in 2020:

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