

TUNISIA

31 December 2020

Key figures

6,355

Persons of concern to UNHCR (asylum-seekers & refugees)

3,237

Newly registered in 2020 as part of an enhanced backlog clearing exercise

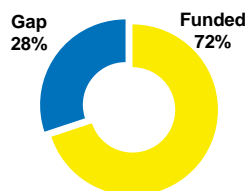
650

Refugee and asylum-seeking households received cash assistance

334

Refugee and asylum-seeking children enrolled in primary and secondary schools

Funding

 USD **12.3 M** required in 2020

 USD **8.4 M** received as of 8 December 2020

Operational Context

During 2020, UNHCR Tunisia registered 3,237 new refugees and asylum seekers, doubling the overall registered population in Tunisia within 12 months. This increase was mainly due to enhanced registration capacities that resulted in a reduction to the backlog of individuals awaiting registration, but also due to an increase in registration requests confirming 2019 trends, namely from Ivorian and Syrian nationals. Some 1,800 individuals are currently awaiting registration, while 3,000 already registered persons are awaiting Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures to be finalized.

As of 31 December 2020, Tunisia recorded 147,061 cases of COVID-19. During the second half of the year, the virus spread at a faster rate, with a 700 per cent increase of cases during the last quarter. During December, the Government of Tunisia announced the extension of nightly curfew until 15 January 2021; early closure of cafes and restaurants; the cancellation of all trade shows and conventions; and a limit of 30 participants for weddings and funerals. In order to comply with those measures, most group activities for refugees and asylum-seekers were suspended or carried out through reduced presence, while in-office presence for UNHCR staff remained limited to 50 per cent.

On 24 December, a boat carrying 40 individuals of different sub-Saharan nationality was rescued by Tunisian authorities off the coast Sfax. The boat departed from Sidi Mansour towards Europe when it faced began to sink. Five persons were rescued and immediately transferred to medical services, while 20 bodies were retrieved, including pregnant women and a refugee youth from Togo. In June 2020, another shipwreck in the same area resulted in the death of 61 persons, mostly women and children.

Operational Response

During December, UNHCR and its partner the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR) finalized a reference document drafted along with the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training aimed at improving socio-economic inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia, due to be published in January. The document—which is the result of extensive advocacy and joint collaboration—contains measures to mitigate administrative barriers and legal challenges currently preventing refugees and asylum seekers from accessing the formal labour market, particularly those not in possession of other documents beyond a refugee card.

During the first week of December, a clothing donation from the Japanese firm UNIQLO arrived in Medenine to be processed for distribution by UNHCR and partners CTR and UTSS. This donation will benefit some 8,000 individuals both with the refugee and host community during the first quarter of 2021.

On 1 December, a one-day working session for Child Protection Delegates from Ministry of Women and Family Affairs and family judges was organized by UNHCR partner AIRH, with the aim of including refugee children into the Tunisian national child protection system. The main outcomes included the mapping of existing services and identification of best practices as a first step in the creation of a coordination document establishing standard national procedures on refugee child protection.

As of 31 December, 334 refugee and asylum-seeking children were enrolled in primary, secondary and higher education in Tunisia for the school year 2020-2021. Moreover, six refugee children were admitted to kindergarten free of charge in Tataouine in the south. UNHCR and partner CTR facilitated the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children into national education system with strategic discussions with education

authorities at different levels, in addition to organizing catch-up classes. Refugee families received an education grant towards payment of fees and school materials.

UNHCR and Tunisia's Ministry of Social Affairs signed an agreement to provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in Tunisia.

On 2 December, UNHCR Tunisia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and a Partnership Agreement with the Tunisian Union for Social Solidarity (UTSS), with the aim of enabling persons of concern to UNHCR to access social services.

The MoSA has always worked closely with UNHCR and its partners, expressing an interest in improving the living conditions of refugees and asylum-seekers in Tunisia and guaranteeing their basic rights and social protections.

This MoU will be implemented through a partnership agreement concluded between UNHCR and the Tunisian Union for Social Solidarity (UTSS). The latter is composed of local associations, regional federations and national leagues engaged in social solidarity. UTSS aims to develop solidarity and mutual aid among the different parts of Tunisia's population, and strengthen a sense of volunteerism among citizens for the benefit of impoverished and disadvantaged groups. UTSS is also called by the MoSA to participate in the elaboration and realization of a general and integrated policy in the field of social solidarity.

The partnership with UTSS aims to strengthen the capacities of Ministry-run social centres in the governorates of Tunis, Sfax and Sidi Bouzid which will improve access for vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers to safe housing and temporary accommodation, and is used as a framework for the distribution of clothing donated by the Japanese firm UNIQLO for persons of concern to UNHCR and vulnerable host community members.

The MoSA previously signed partnership agreements with two UNHCR partners, namely the Tunisian Refugee Council (CTR) and the Arab Institute for Human Rights (AIHR). The MoSA has also received support by UNHCR in the framework of a project funded by the European Union and the Swiss Government that was carried out between 2016 - 2019. The support included equipment for three Ministry-run social structures in Tunis, Sousse and Sfax, as well as capacity-building for Ministry agents in international protection measures.

It is worth noted the MoSA issued a decision in May 2019 to support refugee socioeconomic inclusion by granting them access to the national social security system as long as they have certified employment contracts or are self-employed and registered with UNHCR.



UNHCR Tunisia is grateful for the support of: [The European Union](#) | [Italy](#) | [Luxembourg](#) | [Monaco](#) | [Netherlands](#) | [RDPP NA – EU](#) | [Switzerland](#) | [UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund](#) | [United States of America](#). UNHCR is also grateful to those who have contributed to UNHCR programmes with unearmarked and softly earmarked funds.